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news

significant shorts

Nurse was victim of sudden death

The sudden death of a "fit and healthy" student nurse has baffled doctors. Helen Boyd, 21, was found dead in her bed in student lodgings in October and doctors now believe she is one of the 200 inexplicable deaths in Britain every year.

An inquest in Nottingham last week heard how doctors did not know how or why she died despite exhaustive tests. A consultant pathologist, Dr Peter James, said she could have been a victim of Sudden Adult Death Syndrome.

"We still don't know what causes it. It could be related to a sleeping position - we don't know", he said.

The inquest heard how security staff found her body in lodgings at the Queen's medical Centre, Nottingham, after being alerted by friends. The coroner recorded an open verdict.

Serb link to Tory funds

The Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards, Sir Gordon Downey, is to be asked by Labour to investigate links between Serbia and Tory funds.

The move follows a report yesterday that Harold Eilenson, MP for Blackpool North, worked for MI6 in Eastern Europe and was said to have told his handlers that Serb donations were reaching party headquarters. Yesterday he described the allegations as "schoolboy fiction". *Fran Abrams*

Yawning gap for parents

More than a million parents are suffering the torture of sleep deprivation inflicted by young children.

Researchers at the Bristol Institute of Child Health found that two-thirds of parents with babies between six- and 18-months old are woken regularly.

Many parents were woken up to eight times a night by their babies. The result was enormous stress on marriages and work.

'Crash' on course for screening

The controversial film *Crash*, which has been described as depraved and wicked, could be screened in Britain by the end of next month.

Censors say that the film, which depicts sadomasochists aroused by car accidents and mutilation, should be cleared for release after certain cuts.

Westminster City Council, which imposed a ban on the screening of *Crash* in the West End of London, will reconsider after the British Board of Film Classification makes its decision.

Search for missing girl, 9

A big police hunt has been launched for a nine-year-old girl missing from home for three days.

Kayleigh Ward has not been seen since she went out to buy chips from a shop near her home in Chester on Thursday evening.

More than 70 police officers, including dog handlers and underwater search teams, yesterday scoured land in the city and brought in a police aircraft to search open areas.

Guru 'seduced teenager'

Sir Laurens van der Post, the Prince of Wales's "spiritual guru", seduced a 14-year-old girl and later denied he was the father of her child, it was claimed yesterday.

Sir Laurens died on Monday at his London home, aged 90, and the Prince attended Friday's funeral.

But Carl Mostert, who claims to be his daughter, told the *Mail on Sunday* that her mother was seduced by Sir Laurens on a ship.

£10m winner

One winner will be enjoying a £10.3m Christmas after scooping the National Lottery jackpot. And further 20 will claim £158,977 each. The winning numbers were 26, 45, 42, 5, 35 and 38, with

Carey and Hume put moral issues in election spotlight

The Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr George Carey, and Cardinal Basil Hume, head of the Catholic Church in England and Wales, yesterday called for a return to Christian values in Christmas messages.

Earlier this year, Dr Carey called for a national debate on morality, and speaking on GMTV's *Sunday Programme* he repeated his warning about the state of Britain's values, hitting out at "DIY morality"

and slipping standards.

Cardinal Hume, meanwhile, urged people to consider moral issues before casting their votes at the next election. In an interview with Adam Boulton on Sky News, he urged voters to press candidates over their stance on "life" issues such as abortion and euthanasia, but insisted he was not telling people which party to back.

When he was asked whether MPs were setting a good

example, Dr Carey said the Church and politicians had to work together. "I want us to get beyond the kind of them and us society, that they are to blame and we're being wronged... a partnership is required to make this country strong again."

Despite the slide away from the tradition of morality, Dr Carey said there were encouraging signs of a return to decency and a rejection of cheating and violence. "There

is a deep longing to have moral standards and indeed I think what has happened, what has heartened me enormously, is there is a consensus emerging in our schools and elsewhere. So we needn't throw up our hands in despair," he declared.

Dr Carey also refused to criticise the Prince of Wales for the breakdown of his marriage and on the issue of homosexuals in the Church urged that homophobia be resisted

in all walks of life.

Cardinal Hume stressed that voters had to "follow their own consciences", but added: "I would always urge them to put the question to perspective MPs - 'Where do you stand on this issue of life?' - not only the question of abortion, but also euthanasia." With anti-abortion groups preparing to put up candidates at the election, Britain could find the issue becomes a major theme as in the

USA. Cardinal Hume said society was "obsessed with sex", and argued that human life began from the moment of conception, but warned against adopting "extreme" tactics. Cardinal Hume also called for issues such as "how we treat people in their lives, how we look after the old, what are we doing for the unemployed, what are we doing for those who have no homes" to become focal points at the election.



Terry Waite, accompanied by fellow former Beirut hostage John McCarthy, addressing the vigil for the hostages at a service in Blackburn yesterday

Waite's plea for Kashmir hostages

Joanna Snicker

Father denies claims that guerrillas murdered their captives a year ago

The father of one of four men held hostage by guerrillas in Kashmir yesterday dismissed reports that the captives had been killed a year ago. The news came as churches across Britain held a day-long vigil for the men who have been held for 537 days.

Bob Wells, 52, was speaking after a church service in Blackburn for his son, Paul, who was a student at Nottingham University before his capture in July 1995. Former Beirut hostages Terry Waite and John McCarthy issued a strong plea for the Kashmiris to disclose information about the

fate of the two Britons, one German and one American.

The *Indian Express* newspaper yesterday ran a story that one of the kidnappers, now in jail, had claimed the men were killed by their captors on 13 December last year.

Mr Wells, who last heard official news of his son a year ago, said: "We have heard this before and this is the original rumour circulating again. It is the same story that people are constantly latching on to. It is extremely distressing for us every time

it gets repeated. "Until we get positive information and positive knowledge that they are no longer around, we will continue to believe they are still alive."

Paul Wells, 25, Keith Mangin, 36, of Middlesbrough, Cleveland, and American climber, Donald Hutchens, 43, were kidnapped at gunpoint from a campsite while trekking in the area. Dirk Hasert, 26, of Germany was seized four days later. A fifth hostage, Norwegian Hans Ostroec, was be-

headed in August 1995. Officially, the men have not been sighted for over a year, but the *Kashmiri Times* carried a picture of them as recently as last November.

Terry Waite, who was released from a four-year captivity in Beirut in 1991, told the congregation: "Myself and John McCarthy would like to say this - anyone who has any information whatsoever about the Western hostages, please now come forward and let us know." He urged people in Kashmir

that a charity such as the Red Cross would be a secure way of passing on information, adding that had news been better than no news. "Say you have a special message for John McCarthy and Terry Waite and let us have this information this Christmas time so we can face the truth," he said.

More than 250 people attended the service at the Wells family parish church, Immanuel, in Feniscowles, Lancashire. Mr Wells was delighted with the support and recogni-

tion of the hostage campaign. "Terry Waite and John McCarthy's presence made a great deal of difference," he said. Earlier he had read a prayer for the captives as his wife, Dianne, lit a candle for each of the four. Finally, John McCarthy lit a fifth candle for the people of Kashmir and those holding the men captive.

The Wells plan to spend a quiet Christmas at home with their two other children. "We'll be getting on with things quietly but keeping Paul in our minds and hearts," Mr Wells said. "We're sad to have to spend yet another Christmas not knowing."

Mandelson defends right to go for chauffeur-driven spin

Fran Abrams and Jojo Moyes

Labour's chief spin-doctor Peter Mandelson last night tried to talk down revelations that he has accepted a pre-Christmas gift of a car, complete with chauffeur.

The silver Rover is a present to the Labour Party from the Ministry of Sound, the nightclub owned by James Palumbo, estranged son of the Tory peer Lord Palumbo, but Mr Mandelson has apparently enjoyed much of the benefit.

The news that Labour's head of election planning has achieved chauffeur-driven status is bound to cause resentment among his colleagues. Mr Mandelson is seen as being at the heart of New Labour and is deeply disliked by those on the left. Many people in the party see him as a dark force behind Tony Blair's throne.

Tensions between him and John Prescott, the deputy leader, are reported to have escalated recently, with both men vying to be chosen for the post of Deputy Prime Minister in the event of a Labour victory.

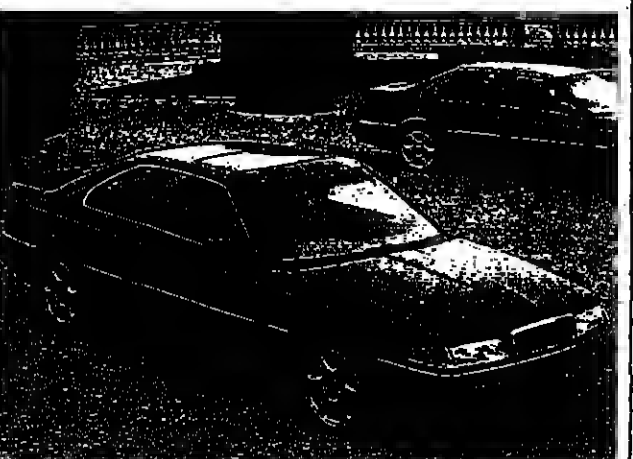
Mr Blair is the only other Labour figure to enjoy the luxury of a chauffeur-driven car, through access to an official government car. Mr Prescott has a Rover lent by the manufacturer.

Until recently Mr Mandelson could be seen driving his own green Rover. Since the beginning of December, however, he has been able to travel in more style.

He is known to be friendly with Mr Palumbo, whose club uses the same advertising agency as Labour and who has run left-leaning campaigns to



Gearing up: Mr Mandelson says the 'gift' Rover can help the Labour election effort



persuade young people to vote. Ministry of Sound staff say Mr Mandelson is a visitor. He was seen dancing in his tuxedo at the Ministry of Sound's fifth anniversary party in September and chatting to Mr Palumbo. The club is a stone's throw from Labour's headquarters in south London.

Mr Mandelson, the MP for Hartlepool, is abroad with friends and the car was said last night to be in the care of its chauffeur. However, he phoned his staff to ensure that his views on the matter were recorded.

"This is a welcome contribution to Labour's campaign effort," Mr Mandelson said in a statement. "We are a professional mobile team at Millbank and the days of relying on a penny-farthing machine are over."

His aide, Benjamin Wegg-Prosser, said other staff at Labour's Millbank media centre had been able to use the car. Mr Mandelson had consulted the Parliamentary Commis-

sioner for Standards, Gordon Downey, about it and had agreed as a result to declare it in the register of members' interests, he said. If the cost of the car ran to more than £5,000 it would appear in the party's accounts, he said.

"We welcome all the help and assistance which people can give to our campaign," Mr Wegg-Prosser said. "The car has been given to the Labour Party by the Ministry of Sound for the use of Mr Mandelson and staff at the party's media centre."

Mr Wegg-Prosser could not say who else had used the car or how often, or what kind of Rover it was. Tony Blair's press officer, Alastair Campbell, said he had travelled in it himself and it was used for courier work.

A Conservative Party spokesman said the gift was rather appropriate. "It is ironic that the Ministry of Sound are lending a car to the Minister for Soundbites," he said.

Mr Palumbo, 34, founder of the Ministry of Sound, is prob-

ably best known for his long-standing feud with his father, against whom he took legal action over the multi-million-pound family trust.

He was also the creator and backer of the creator of "Rock The Vote", the music industry's attempt to get young people to the polls, which began in a blaze of publicity last February. Although the campaign's organisers were keen to stress its neutrality, Tory supporters felt that Labour had hijacked it.

Rock the Vote was superseded in October by a £250,000 "Use Your Vote" advertising campaign run by the Ministry of Sound record label.

Ice blamed as four die in road crashes

At least four people were killed in ice-related road accidents yesterday as Christmas holiday travellers braved bitter weather.

Massive queues built up around Britain's shopping centres, although motoring organisations said major routes were flowing fairly freely.

Temperatures plunged as low as -11.7C (12F) in Scotland overnight and forecasters warned the chill would continue. They held out the possibility of some snow on Christmas Day, although it may not amount to more than a few flakes in the east.

On the roads three people died when a van and car crashed on the A166 at Gate Helmsley, between York and Stamford Bridge, North Yorkshire.

A man was killed at Turvey, Bedfordshire when his car left an icy road and collided with a tree.

Temperatures were expected to plunge again last night. The London Weather Centre reported the reading of -11.7C on Saturday night from Aviemore, Scotland, and said temperatures in that area had not risen above freezing all day yesterday. The chill, brought by air from Eastern Europe, is expected to last until after Christmas.

Ladbrokes cut the odds on a white Christmas from 4/1 to 3/1. Meanwhile heavy traffic built up around both out-of-town and urban shopping centres.

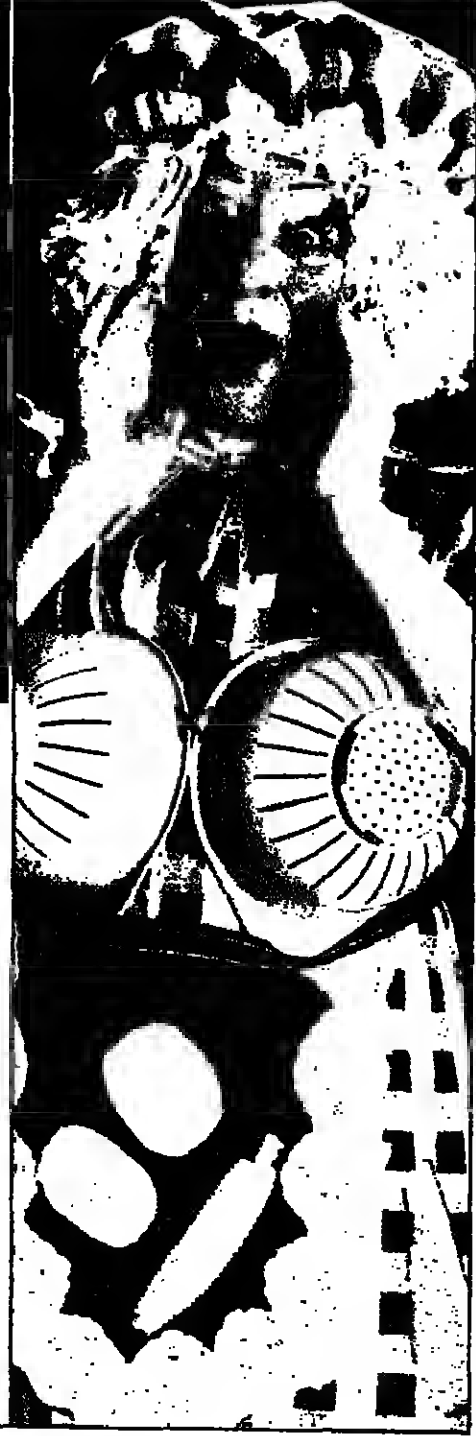
The RAC reported an eight-mile queue on the A1M outside the Metro Centre, Gateshead and said there was heavy traffic through the Dartford Tunnel with shoppers heading to the Lakeside centre at Thurrock, Essex. Traffic also remained busy around airports.

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The bullethole that may reignite Ulster's war

The loyalist ceasefire has stabilised Ulster. But after Friday's attack, David McKitterick asks whether it can survive

In a local election in May this year, one Unionist voter in 10 gave their support to two of the fringe loyalist parties whose previous levels of support could only be described as microscopic.

In doing so, the voters were signalling their endorsement of a new phenomenon in Northern Ireland: the fierce loyalist paramilitary had sprouted political wings which were, paradoxically, strikingly more moderate than mainstream Unionism.

Their appearance was a source of some dismay to the main Unionist parties. They watched with alarm as their votes leaked away and their hardline stances were undermined.

But the "new loyalists" were feted by almost everyone else as a refreshing and positive new element.

That vote secured places at the Stormont political talks for the two parties, the Progressive Unionists and the Ulster Democratic Party which, in essence, speak for the principal loyalist paramilitary groups, the UVF and UDA.

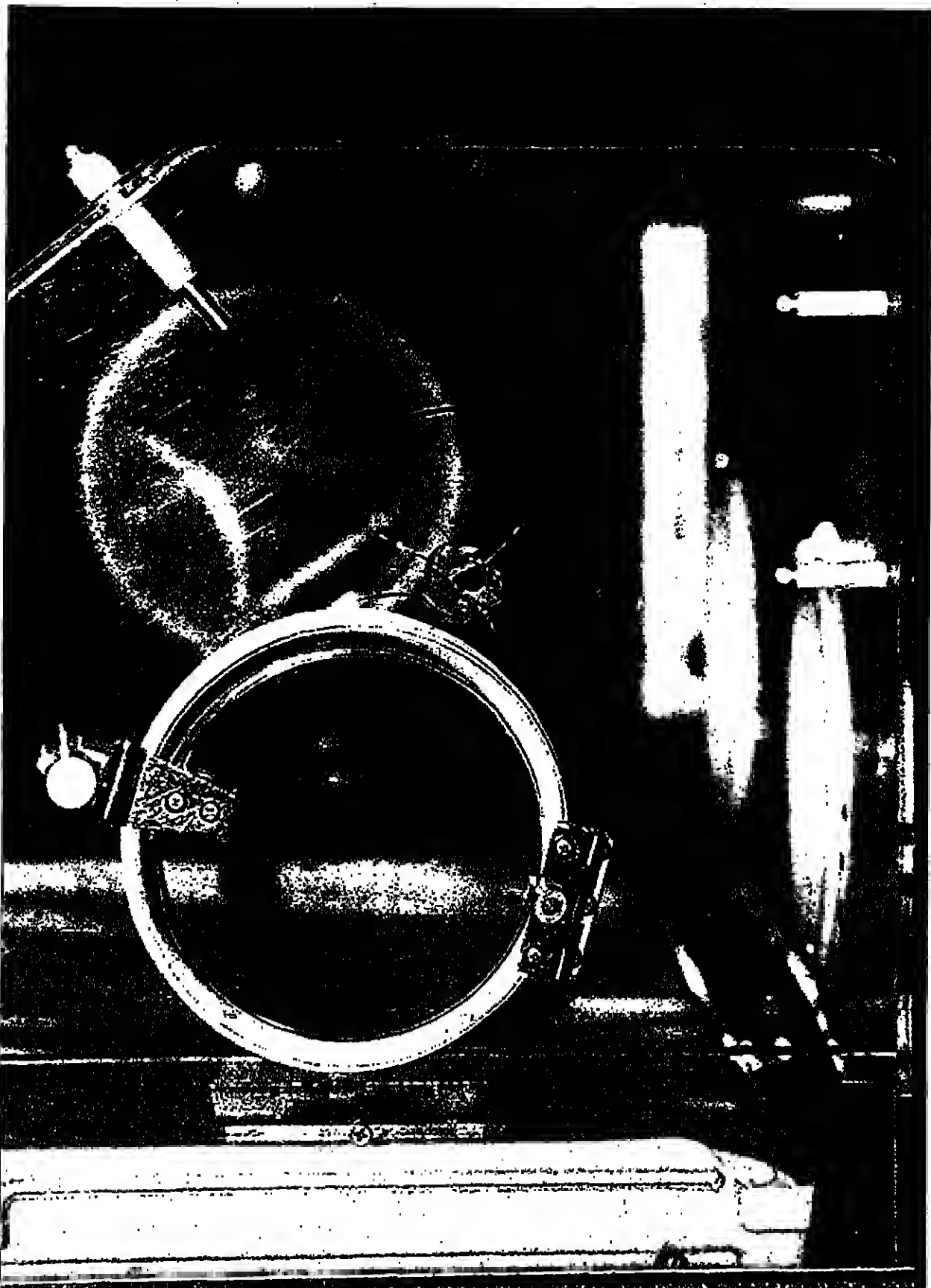
The value of the two parties since then, in the eyes of most of the political spectrum, has been twofold:

On the one hand, they have played a constructive and by all accounts impressive role within the talks themselves.

On the other hand, the parties have helped to persuade the loyalist hard men not to go back to violence, even after the February collapse of the IRA ceasefire.

But the ceasefire's collapse meant that the IRA would be keeping up some level of violence, and that meant that sooner or later the loyalist cessation was bound to end. There were several reasons why it did not end sooner.

One was that politics proved to have an unexpected lure for the loyalists. The sight of their representatives being received in the White House and elsewhere had a real potency, and



The bullethole left in an incubator in the Royal Belfast Hospital for Sick Children after IRA gunmen opened fire on a Unionist politician in the hospital on Friday. Nigel Dodds, the former Lord Mayor of Belfast, was in the hospital visiting his seven-year-old son, Andrew, who suffers from spina bifida and hydrocephalus. A policeman guarding Mr Dodds was injured in the attack. The incubator, fortunately, was empty at the time

in October, the IRA mostly confined its activities to Britain, and bombs in England are less provocative to the loyalists than bombs in Belfast.

All this helped keep the loyalist peace. In the meantime, the paramilitary groups did not dissolve themselves. Like the IRA, they remained in being, continued such activities as "punishment" beatings, and kept their powder dry.

The loyalist ceasefire has saved lives on a day-to-day basis, has increased the isolation of the IRA and helped keep the talks show on the road.

But the fringe loyalist spokesmen have warned that stresses and strains on the cessation have mounted with each new IRA attack and that loyalist patience was finite.

At the same time, they have preached to their paramilitary associates that reverting to violence would ease the pressure on the IRA and probably mean their expulsion from the talks.

Now the question arises of whether the loyalists intend a return to full-scale conflict, or whether they are planning the type of intermittent campaign which the IRA has waged since February.

The recent pre-eminence of the political loyalist has led many to forget that in the early 1990s the UVF and UDA killed more people than did the IRA.

There are hopes, but no guarantees, that a return to the worst of the bad old days is not a prospect.

One fear, however, is that a new "tit for tat" cycle develops, since this could easily escalate into a high level of violence.

Another bleak scenario is that the expulsion of the loyalist parties from the Stormont talks will lead to them turning away from politics, and that with the eclipse of the loyalist parties, there will be a reversion to the old belief that violence is a more potent force than dialogue.

was good for their self-esteem. Added to that was the fact that individual loyalists, such as David Ervine and Billy Hutchinson, took to politics so well, and proved so articulate

and effective, that this became a source of pride among loyalist working-class communities. Another reason was the hope that the IRA cessation might be restored.

Analogous as they are to Sinn Féin, the fringe parties had an instinctive empathy with what was happening within the republican movement and with the difficulties

involved in being part of a movement with both paramilitary and political aspects.

It also helped that, until the bombing of the army's County Antrim headquarters



Comrades in arms: Eddie Copeland standing outside the Crumlin Rd court last year; Gerry Adams, carrying the coffin of Copeland's friend, Thomas Begley

Bomb victim knew he was a marked man

David McKitterick
Ireland correspondent

Eddie Copeland, the republican activist injured in yesterday's bomb attack, has led an eventful, violence-suspected life in what is probably Northern Ireland's most violent locality.

On the streets of the small, cramped Catholic ghetto of Ardoyne, his father was shot dead by troops in the early

1970s. He himself was shot twice by a soldier three years ago. He has been stalked by loyalist gunmen; now he has narrowly escaped death.

Mr Copeland has known for years that he was a marked man, carrying as he does the reputation of being one of north Belfast's most senior republican figures.

It was in October 1971 that his father was killed by the Army on his

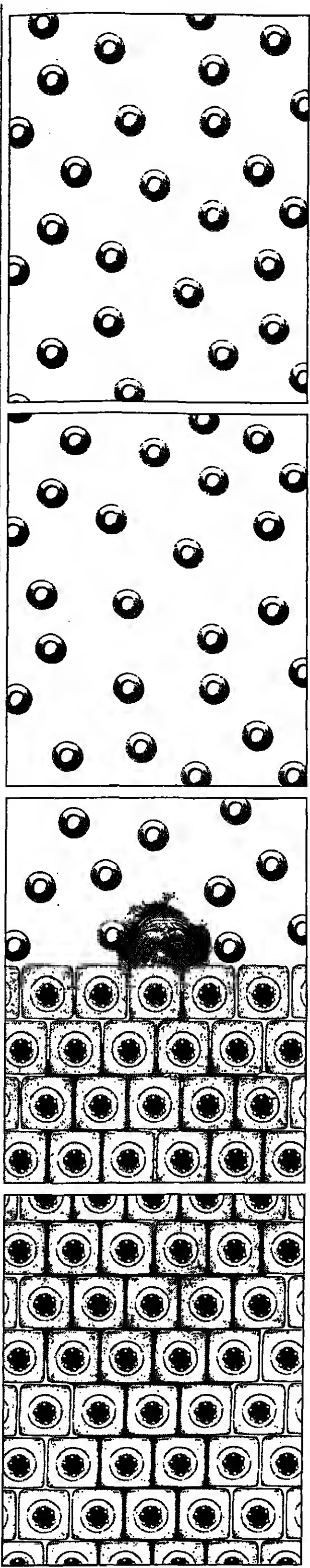
doorstep: troops claimed he had a gun, but later a soldier came forward to say he was unarmed.

Mr Copeland was for years high on the loyalist paramilitary target list, but in 1993 it was a soldier who almost killed him. His friend Thomas Begley had just been killed, together with Protestant civilians, in a premature IRA explosion as he planted a bomb in a Shankill Road fish shop.

He was standing with other mourners outside the Begley household in Ardoyne when a soldier on patrol opened fire on him, hitting him twice. The soldier was later jailed for 10 years. The court heard that the patrol had been shown a photograph of Mr Copeland before being sent out: the soldier, it was said, felt "generally pissed off at seeing players [republican activists] walking the streets".

The following year he was alleged by David Trimble, now leader of the Ulster Unionist party, to be an IRA "godfather". Mr Trimble used parliamentary privilege to make the allegation.

A plaque on a gable wall in Ardoyne carries the names of more than 120 local people killed in the troubles. Yesterday Mr Copeland's was almost added to the list.



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news

Huge rise in jobless single parents

Barrie Clement

This Christmas an estimated 3 million children will be in households without work after a massive increase in the number of jobless single mothers.

Since 1992 an extra 400,000 children live in homes where the adults are unemployed. The rise has occurred exclusively because of the increase in unemployed lone parents, who are overwhelmingly women.

The figures, compiled by the House of Commons library for Peter Hain, Labour's employment spokesman, show a 15 per cent increase in the number of children in jobless families since the last election.

According to the analysis of the Government's Labour Force Survey, the number of jobless two-parent households has remained almost static over the period at about 500,000, while the number of workless lone parent homes has increased by 220,000.

Mr Hain said the statistics were a "shocking indictment" of a government which supposedly espoused family values. The data also showed that ministers' employment policies were failing, he said.

Right-wingers, however, will interpret the figures as proof of growing fecklessness among young women at a time when unemployment is dropping.

Many on the right of the Conservative Party believe that young single females deliberately become pregnant to secure higher benefits and priority for council accommodation.

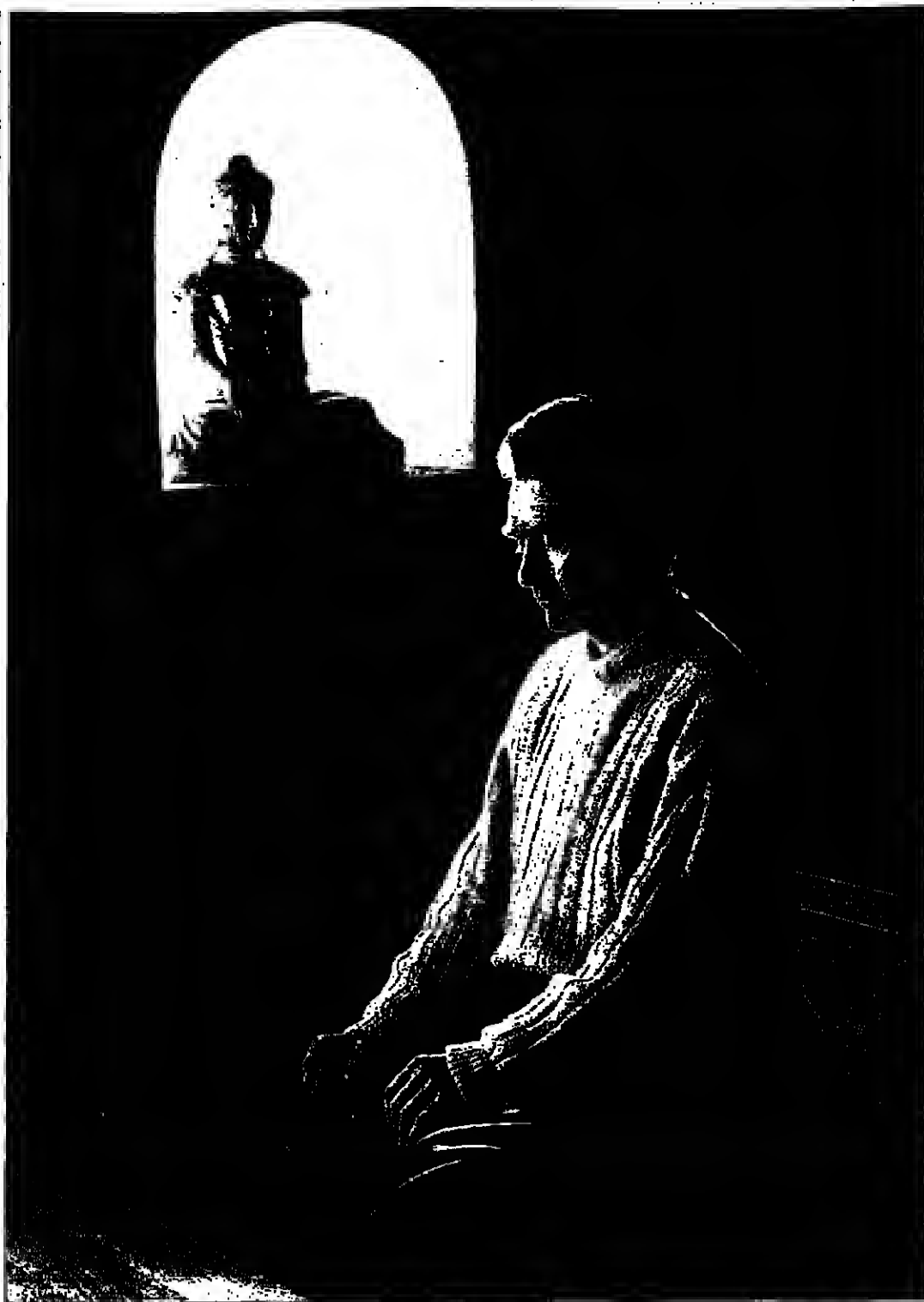
Mr Hain, however, believes that single mothers are being victimised. "Instead of picking on lone mothers and trapping them in poverty, the Government should be helping them to find work," he said.

Ministers were crowding about the reduction in "fiddled" unemployment figures, but their policies were creating ghettos of joblessness and benefit dependency, starting up serious social problems, he said.

"Far from being the party of the family, Tory policies are trapping families across the country in a world without work."

"It is a disgrace that three million children face spending Christmas in a home with no one in work. The best Christmas present ministers could give these youngsters is the chance of a job for their parents. Labour believes lone parents need a hand-up, not a hand-out."

He said Labour's policies would provide a national child care strategy to enable parents to match working hours with family responsibilities and a more flexible benefit system to provide "a bridge rather than a barrier to work".



Inner exploration: Tranquillity on a Buddhist retreat

Photograph: Mykel Nicolaou

Love, peace and tranquillity in a world beyond Christmas

Andrew Brown
Religious Affairs Correspondent

For a totally different Christmas - with no turkey, no alcohol, no carols and, finally, non-being - why not try a Buddhist retreat this year? The Friends of the Western Buddhist Order, one of the largest Buddhist groups in the country, is organising a week-long retreat in a boarding school in Oxfordshire, for people who want to get as far away as possible from the traditional celebrations and find themselves instead.

Retreating from the world at Christmas is surprisingly easy. There are 16 Christian centres that stay open over the period for people who need a more religious Christmas than is available outside. The Buddhist retreat is more centred around the new year. The 70 participants will spend their days in meditation and chores, leading up to a final ceremony on New Year's Eve, when they will be encouraged to write on slips of paper the habits and sadnesses which they want to leave behind them in the new year. These will then be burned, and desirable virtues prayed for.

One of the leaders of the retreat is Paramabandhu, a psychiatrist working part time at a London hospital who has taken a Sanskrit name in accordance with the practice of the Western Buddhist Order. "This time of year does particularly lend itself to introspection," he says. "A retreat is a very good space to do that in, and to think about the year that is coming."

Most of the participants will not be Buddhists but they will be taught Buddhist terms and precepts. The purpose of the retreat, says Paramabandhu, is to cultivate "awareness and friendliness".

"The retreats are just really enjoyable things to do anyway. They are about having a deeper experience and looking a bit deeper into one's life."

The daily routine is certainly a change from the Christmas most

people will be enjoying. The retreaters will rise to a meditation at 7.30am, followed by a vegetarian breakfast, a work period, more meditation, and then supper. After that, there will be a talk on spiritual matters, and a final ceremony to close the day.

Christmas Day might be marked with a slightly festive meal, he says - perhaps a out roast.

Christian retreats are a very different matter. Sister Pippa, the retreat mistress at the retreat house in Chester, says that a large number of those who come to her are repeat customers. Her Christmas retreats, which last from Christmas Eve to the day after Boxing Day, are booked up by September most years. They cater for single people, but there is a strong sense of community.

"Sometimes people come because Christmas is a time for families, and we provide a sort of family Christmas - for people who want Christ in the middle of Christmas. There is quite a lot of prayer and worship in the middle of celebration. It's not very interesting, but this is why they come."

Sometimes, she says, people come on retreat Christmases after bereavements. They want to avoid the bruising jollities of the outside world, yet not be completely alone.

"Normally when people come on retreat, they come to be quiet and to pray, but at Christmas it is really for people and we do all the usual things: we sing carols, and have a turkey and mince pies and everything else. Just like an alternative family."

"We have people enquiring sometimes who think it will be a silent affair," she says, and laughs out loud.

The National Retreat Association publishes *The Vision*, a directory of more than 200 Christian retreat houses around the country, available from 0171 357 7736 at £4.30; the FWBO is at the London Buddhist Centre, 51 Roman Road, London E2 0HU, 0181 981 1225.

Taxman set to pounce on City's huge bonuses

Clare Garner

Hundreds of City whizzkicks have been awarded the highest Christmas bonuses on record, and many have become instant millionaires. The bad news is that the taxman waiting in the wings is determined to have a seasonal slice of any bonus, be it a box of chocolates or a £1m cheque.

Some 1,500 City bankers and brokers are basking in the rewards for a bumper year in the Square Mile. Each has scooped more than £500,000. The bonuses are 40 per cent up on last year and are estimated to total £750m.

An Inland Revenue spokeswoman spelled out that regardless of whether the gift was in cash or kind, it should be taxed. "If people get a gift or

bonus because of their job, it is taxable, even if it is a box of chocolates," she said.

The stock market hit new heights in 1996, with the main FTSE index of the top 100 companies closing at another new peak on Friday. This attracts runs up huge commission earnings for share dealers and professional fund managers.

Another reason for the bonus bonanza is that £42.6bn has been spent this year by companies on takeovers and acquisitions, up £2.3bn on 1995. Each deal generates lucrative fees and bonuses for corporate financiers in merchant banks and advisers in law firms, accountancy practices and public relations consultancies.

Individuals can bid up their pay packet by playing off one potential employer against another.

Last week, a woman handed in her notice at one investment bank and was immediately offered twice her salary to stay on. However, she left for an even better deal elsewhere.

The corporate largesse is evident in brisk business for Porsches and Rolls-Royces and a roaring trade in frivolous but expensive Christmas gifts at stores such as Harrods, in Knightsbridge, London. House prices are spiralling upwards and fine art dealers and auction houses are enjoying the benefits of the bonus handouts.

On a more modest scale, Marks & Spencer employees will be paid the equivalent of four weeks' pay tax-free. However, Inland Revenue staff are a bonus-free zone. "We get nothing, not a sausage," said the spokeswoman.

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Ben Nevis rescuers leave climbers poles apart



Stephen Goodwin
Heritage Correspondent

Controversial marker poles, intended to save lives, could be reinstated on the top of Ben Nevis this Christmas if the area's mountain rescue team sees a break in the weather.

The saga of the two poles on Britain's highest mountain is one of soul searching, uncomradely rancour and potentially of life or death in the graphically named Five Finger Gully.

Fatalities on the Ben are a feature of every winter, with the avalanche-prone Five Finger a particular black spot. To aid navigation off the summit, the Lochaber mountain rescue team erected two 3m-high aluminium poles. That was in autumn 1995. But last month climbers who object to the marring intrusion of the poles cut them down with a backsaw. There is a wicked rumour that the saboteurs have cut the aluminium into strips and intend hammer it into "free the Ben" mementoes.

The Lochaber team has now acquired high-tensile steel replacements and hopes to put the poles back by New Year. "Maybe we'll do it with a Christmas party," Miller Harris, the team secretary, told *The Independent*. Atrocious weather has already forced the abandonment of one attempt. And however rugged the new poles the saboteurs have warned they will be chopped. "The team are just creating work for themselves," said one opponent.

To the non-climber it probably sounds a silly affair. But to climbers, who attach great importance to the freedom to take risks and pit themselves against rock and ice in an unforgiving environment, safety aids present an ethical dilemma.



High drama: Poles placed on the top of Ben Nevis (above and inset) by rescue teams in order to aid navigation have been sawn off by climbers

Photograph: Charles French

The poles dispute has grown into something akin to a religious schism. Roger Payne, general secretary of the British Mountaineering Council, described the Lochaber team's decision to act without consulting the climbing community as "arrogance of the highest order".

Mr Payne has in turn been accused of high-handedness. The 50-strong Lochaber team was particularly incensed at a suggestion that they were behaving like first-aiders at a football match. "We took extreme exception to that," Mr Harris said. "All our team are experienced mountaineers, including three professional guides."

Ben Nevis, 4,060ft high, presents a tricky navigational challenge to climbers who often reach the summit in gathering dusk and driving snow, having completed one of the exhilarating routes up the mountain's ridges and gullies.

To descend safely requires precise compass work with a vital change of bearing at a distance that has to be paced out. But in "white-out" conditions and battered by a cross-wind it is easy to stray left towards Five Finger. The corrie at its head is a classic avalanche trap. With chilling regularity the Lochaber team has had to carry off the bodies of its victims.

"We spend an awful lot of time in there," Mr Harris said. "If there's one place team members don't like going in winter, it's Five Finger. We have warned people that the poles

With 5,000 cards in circulation showing the bearings to follow from the poles, Mr Harris said the saboteurs could have a lot on their conscience if someone had an accident while

'Measures which give the illusion of safety on mountains are fatally flawed'

are no substitute for good navigation. But if they save one life, or keep team members out of danger, they must be worth it."

There were three fatalities on Ben Nevis last winter, but none in Five Finger.

searching for a missing pole. Kevin Howett, general secretary of the Mountaineering Council of Scotland, still hopes to talk to the Lochaber team about a compromise: possibly putting the poles back for this

winter only and then reviewing their value. But he is not optimistic of getting a meeting.

"MCofS believe people should take responsibility for themselves. The safety emphasis should be on teaching people to navigate properly and understanding the risks," said Mr Howett.

Both the MCofS and the BMC are concerned about poles giving a false sense of security. Markers and two high-altitude shelters were removed from the Cairngorm plateau in the wake of a tragedy in 1972. Six teenagers died after failing to reach one of the shelters.

"Measures which give the il-

lusion of safety and encourage people to venture on to serious mountains without the necessary skills are fatally flawed," Mr Payne said.

"What the Lochaber team have done smacks of a 'something-must-be-done' approach without thinking through the long-term consequences."

Doug Scott, one of Britain's most experienced mountaineers, said poles lulled people into areas where they may not have experience to cope. "But it is also a question of aesthetics. Above the last field boundary the mountains should be left as they always have been, with no mark of man."

College chiefs plan Ivy League

Plans are being laid for a "super league" of 12 universities for the brightest students, staffed by the brightest academics, it emerged yesterday.

Four vice-chancellors revealed plans for the formation of an exclusive new "premier division" in higher education.

The four self-appointed super colleges are Cambridge, Warwick, Edinburgh, and University College, London.

Sir Derek Roberts, the Provost of UCL, said that Oxford, the London School of Economics, Imperial College and King's College, London, would be guaranteed premier league places.

"After that it becomes difficult. Candidates would include Lancaster, York, Nottingham and Manchester," he said.

The four top colleges, whose plan would create an American-style "Ivy League", were prompted into action by widespread concern over declining academic standards.

The vice-chancellors also ridicule the notion that their colleges should compare with "new" universities - the former polytechnics.

The four have broken ranks with the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and accept that academic standards are falling.

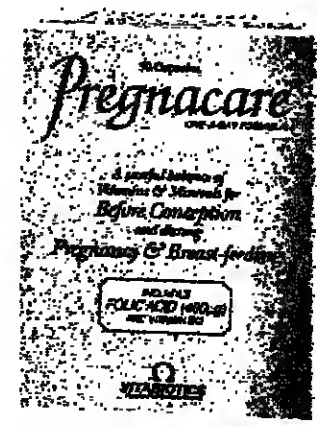
The vice-chancellors draw a clear distinction between a traditional university education and the "trendy" courses offered by many of the newer universities.

Sir Derek said: "We are talking about intellectually challenging subjects ... the core of a good degree is three or four years' study in a difficult academic subject."

As an example, he said, subjects from medicine to law and economics to maths fell into the category, but public relations and media studies did not.

Writing in the *Observer*, the four vice-chancellors, Sir Derek, Alec Broers of Cambridge, Brian Follett of Warwick, and Stewart Sutherland of Edinburgh, said: "Britain's best universities must be treated like premier league soccer clubs. We should nurture them, pay their staff well, give them top-class grounds and encourage them to recruit international strikers."

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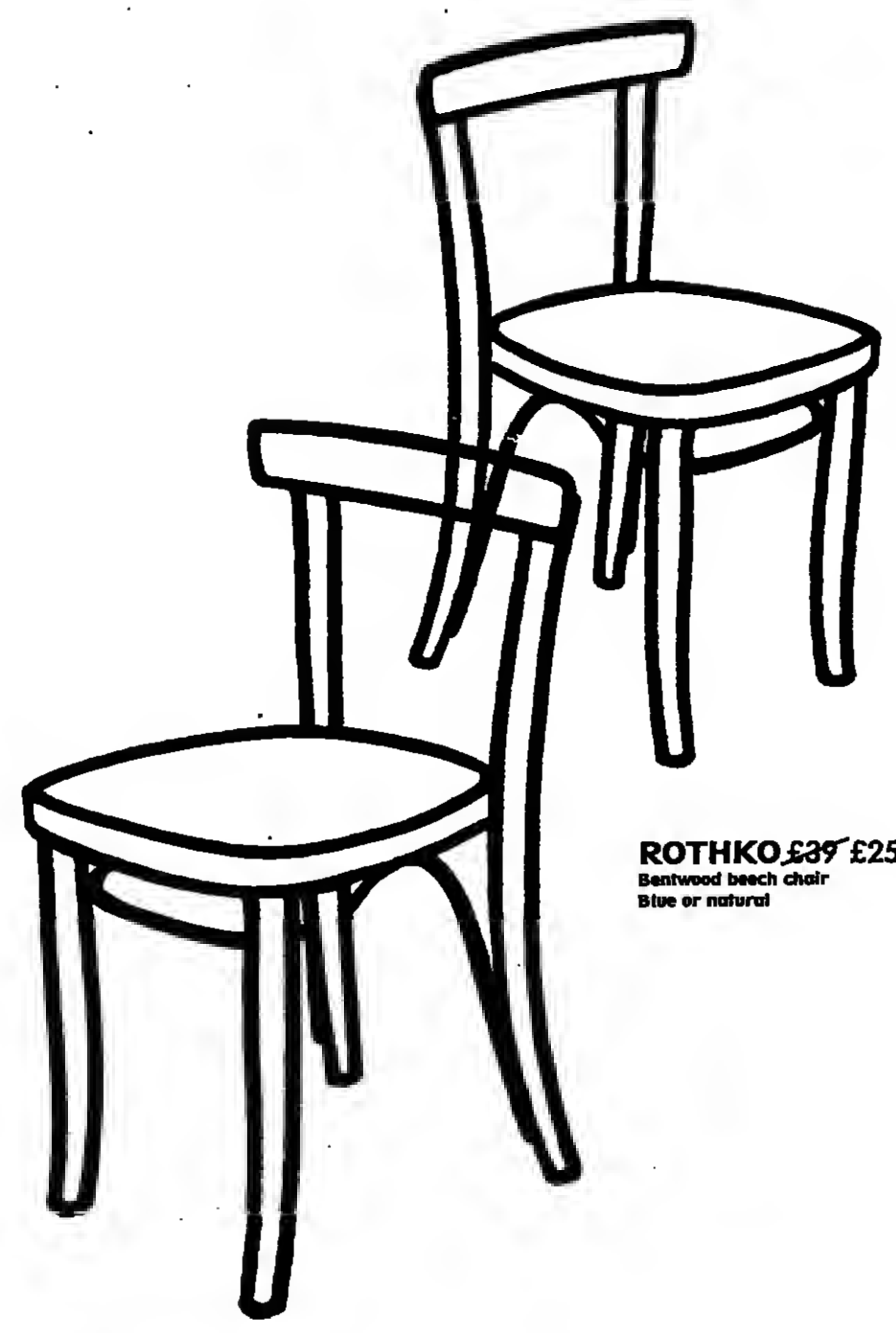
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news

This man is so sick of politicians he has set up his own party. But who would vote for it?

Michael Streeter

John Muir is sick of politicians. He is tired of modern politics. The sentiments may sound familiar to many, but Mr Muir's response was far from conventional: one day, after a trial run on the British public at Speakers' Corner in Hyde Park, he simply founded his own political organisation.

The result, the Albion Party, describes itself boldly as the "newest force in British politics" though so far it has barely managed even a blip on the country's radar screens. Few people outside its claimed 2,000 members will have heard of it.

But Mr Muir is convinced that a mixture of his own eccentric, cherry-picked views combined with a national weariness at the stale debates of Westminster will give the fledgling organisation lift-off.

"I think we can win at least one seat - I am determined and convinced that it can be done," he says. "Though I don't expect everyone to believe that."

The Albion Party purposely

defies easy political labels of right or left or green and Mr Muir simply defines its position as "in front". Its members are aged "nine to ninety" and from all backgrounds and former persuasions, though with a bias towards the regions.

Albion believes the United Kingdom should leave the European Union to recover its sense of identity, but eschews Thatcherite economics and instead seeks a return to the cosy world of the apprentice system, craftsmanship and an emphasis on small businesses, co-operatives and self-employment.

Mr Muir's mix'n'match policies also include commitments to the "basic human right" of a clean environment, including a move towards car-free centres by 2,000, a written constitution, regional assemblies, decriminalisation of marijuana for medicinal purposes and an end to exports of military equipment to regimes that ignore human rights.

Its literature quotes the founder - and *de facto* leader -

as saying: "The answer is self-belief, empowerment and the restoration of democracy."

He insists his only motive is to make a serious impact on the British political landscape, adding, "I'd like it to be fun as well."

John Muir's own background gives little clue to the mixture of progressive and romantic views the Albion Party now holds.

Aged 50, he was brought up

in a family of market gardeners, attended a Jesuit school, had a short-term commission in the 11th Hussars and then began a career in advertising and business.

It was in his most recent career, as a freelance conference organiser, that he formed the idea for a new party, during frequent trips to the former Soviet Union.

"I was going backwards and forwards to Azerbaijan, watch-

ing a country emerge from a union which it had been immersed in for some while," he says.

"It just seems confident in the future despite the deep problems it faces."

He adds: "I sensed a drive and enthusiasm for what could be done."

Mr Muir, who was briefly a Tory party member, thought he saw a parallel with Britain's "lost" potential outside the EU,

and after rejecting the single-issue Referendum Party, and the "three-party mediocracy", set up his own in August.

The party, which has offices in Victoria, central London, has spent thousands of pounds on advertising and takes up most of Mr Muir's time. It has some of the trappings of a political organisation: a full-time staff of six, a glossy brochure - and a financial hacker whom

Mr Muir refuses to name.

In fact, he is notably reluctant to discuss any of the new party's finances, including how he can afford to work full-time for it, save to admit that the administration costs the equivalent of £60,000 a year.

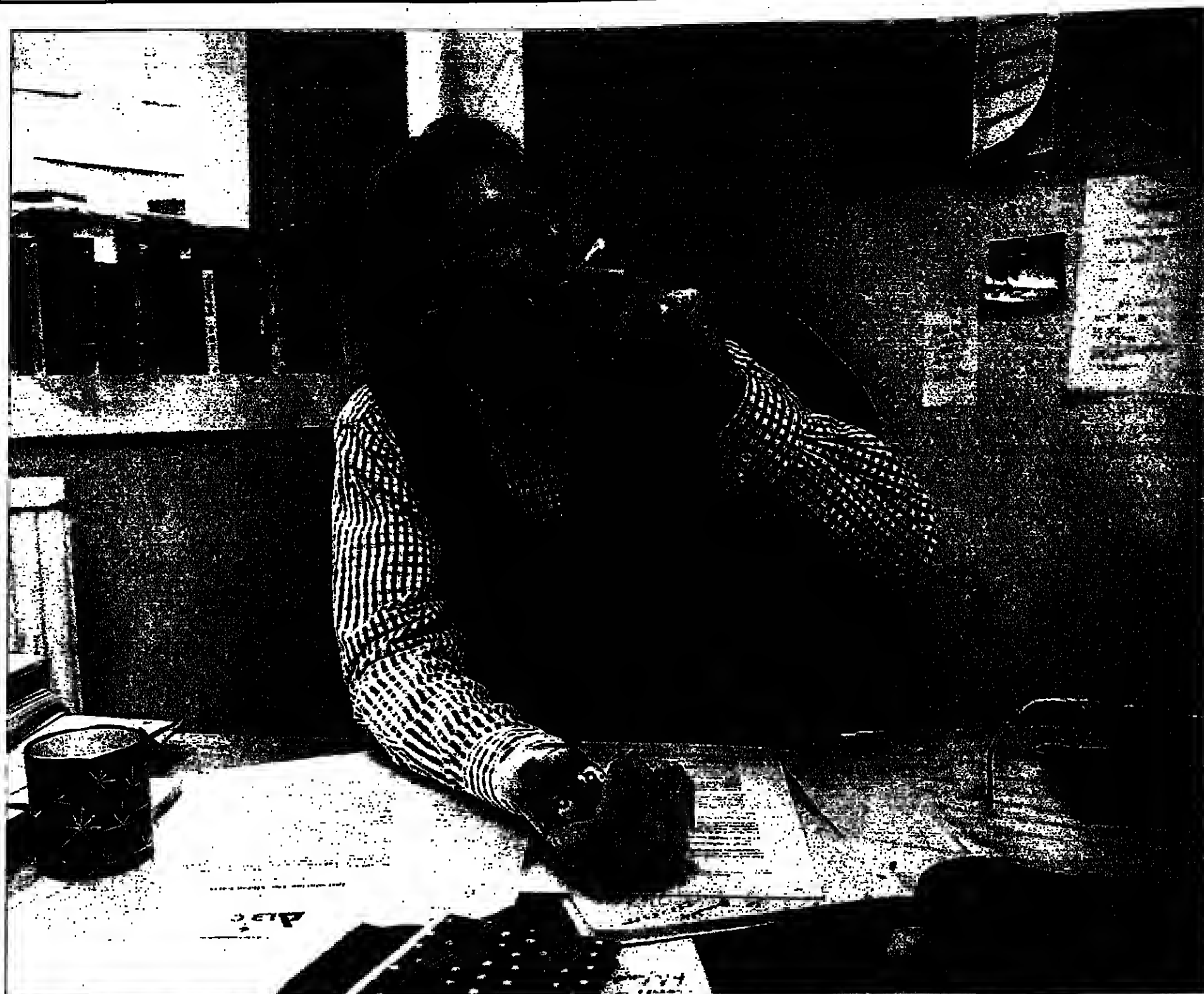
At the moment he is seeking fresh money to ensure Albion can field scores of candidates at the next election.

Devotion to the new party has had unexpected social con-

sequences on some friendships for him and his wife, Caroline. "We have been dropped like hot cakes by a certain set of friends," he says. "Some think I'm off my head."

Mr Muir believes the contrary; that his party will restore sanity, purpose and a sense of identity to British politics.

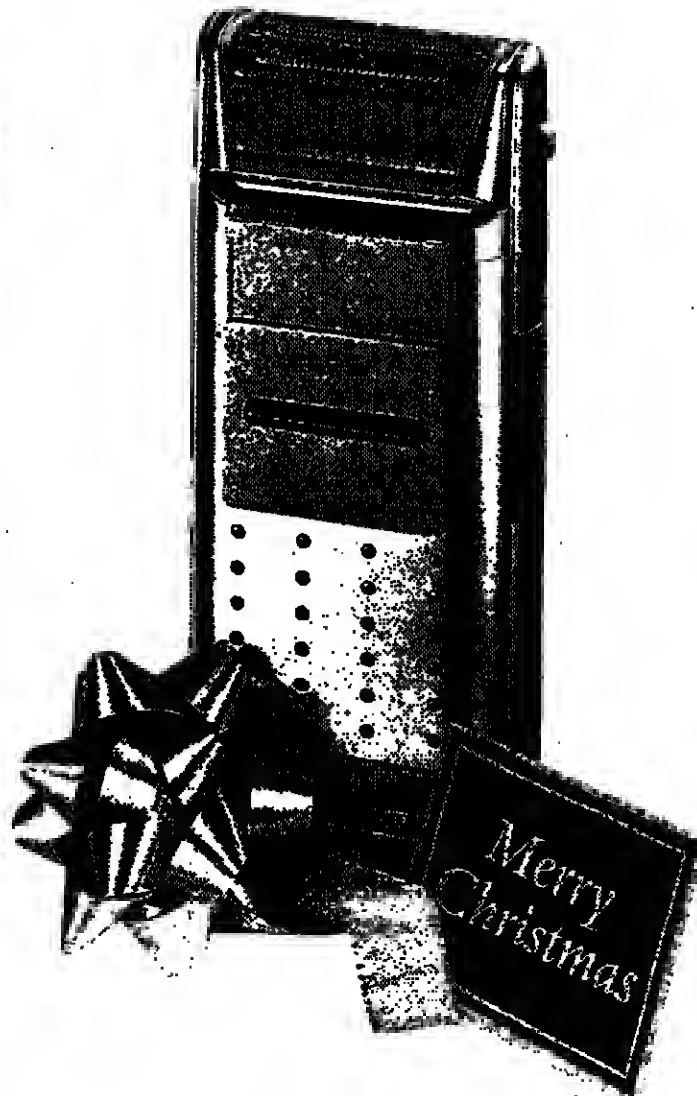
"Of course a lot of people think I'm off my trolley but in fact I'm on my trolley - and it's going in the right direction."



Smoke signals: John Muir, leader of the Albion Party, which believes in small business, regional assemblies and the medical use of marijuana Photograph: Andrew Buurman

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BRAUN

Labour deals blow to millennium festival

Labour confirmed yesterday that it would not "sign a blank cheque" for the Millennium Exhibition, despite warnings that the project was in danger of folding.

A huge dome to be built in Greenwich, south-east London, was expected to be the centrepiece of the millennium celebrations. But Labour's heritage spokesman, Jack Cunningham, insisted yesterday that the Government had failed to come up with a realistic budget and he would not give an open-ended commitment to dip into lottery funds. Labour's backing for the project is seen as crucial because if the party wins the election the millennium celebrations will take place under a Blair government.

Government sources have warned that time is running out and unless the funding dispute is resolved within the next few weeks the exhibition will have

to be abandoned or drastically scaled down. But the Deputy Prime Minister, Michael Heseltine, said that the Government was on course to raise £150m in sponsorship from the private sector and insisted extra lottery money would only be needed to deal with contingencies.

The exhibition was dealt a further setback last week when Barry Hartop, chief executive of the organisers Millennium Central, left at the end of his 90-day contract. The Government is now proposing to take over the running of the project and is considering handing it to a specially created public body, rather than leaving it in the private sector.

Roger Freeman, Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, the Government's troubleshooter who was given the job of sorting out the beef crisis earlier this year, and Jennifer Page, chief

executive of the Millennium Commission, look set to take over Mr Hartop's role.

But Mr Hartop warned yesterday that it was essential for the funding dispute to be resolved soon. "The programme is extremely tight. It is going to be necessary for there to be clarity in the first two to three weeks of January," he told BBC Radio 4's *The World This Weekend*.

On the same programme Dr Cunningham denied that he had been "playing party politics" over the exhibition. "We've been presented very recently with a budget, when we include all the figures, of something around about £1bn for a project which, on the basis of what we've been told, clearly has no possibility of financing itself," he said.

"We were first asked to give an open-ended commitment in time and cash through the millennium lottery income to this

project and we've said no. That would be imprudent. I'm not going to sign a blank cheque for any scheme whatever the cost and that remains our position. What we need to see for this project is a budget which is realistic."

Mr Heseltine said that under the proposals, the Millennium Commission, funded by the National Lottery, would put £200m into the project and another £150m would be raised from the private sector. But he said the Government was proposing to extend funding for the commission beyond 2000 to deal with any cost over-runs.

"In Government we made it clear we weren't prepared to underwrite the situation, but what we were prepared to do was to extend the funding of the Millennium Commission beyond the date which so far is its final date. That would be lottery money."

US rewards Jersey with \$1m for role in seizing drugs money

Philip Jeune

The Jersey police have been awarded more than \$1m (£600,000) by the United States authorities for their help in tracking down the proceeds of drug trafficking.

The money was seized by the US Customs during a money laundering operation organised by Texan drugs smuggler, Victor Stadter.

The Jersey-based trust company which Stadter tried to use to launder the money informed the local police who then initiated an investigation that led to \$2.1m being seized when it was transferred from the Channel Islands to California.

US ambassador William J. Crowe, who will be travelling to Jersey in the New Year to present the award personally, paid tribute to the assistance given by the island.

"Co-operation between jurisdictions, particularly internationally, is a critical element in the fight against international drug trafficking and money laundering," said Ambassador Crowe.

"The superb assistance given by the Jersey authorities led directly to this successful outcome and demonstrates co-operation at its best."

The cash, which represents about 5 per cent of the force's annual budget, will be used to help combat drug trafficking and to promote anti-drug health and education programmes on the island.

Under Jersey law, any finance company dealing with money believed to be connected with drug trafficking or terrorism must inform the police. Around 300 such reports are made each year but according to Det Insp Peter Hopper, head

of the force's commercial branch and financial investigations unit, only 5 per cent lead to police investigations.

The \$1m award is the second substantial sum the island has received following the seizure of drugs money. Last year, it retained £266,000 following a joint investigation with the US Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), an inquiry that was begun when a man arrived at Jersey Airport with a suitcase full of gold bars.

In this latest attempt to use the island for money laundering, Stadter and his partner, fellow American Barry Rosen, set up an account in Jersey claiming that 300 fairground sites they owned produced an income of at least \$100,000 a month. Over the next 6 months, more than \$2m was transferred to the account, but the finance house became suspicious when

Stadter moved the money into another account belonging to a Mexican woman, Marina Anaya-Herrera.

When she attempted to transfer \$2.1m to California, it was seized by the US Customs and in a subsequent San Francisco court action, a jury unanimously decided that the money was the proceeds of drug trafficking, discounting her claim that she had inherited it from her father.

The court heard that Stadter had a long history of involvement in drug smuggling and money laundering and that he had used at least 12 aliases.

Mentioned in more than 70 investigations by the DEA, he is also believed to have arranged the daring helicopter escape by an inmate from the Santa Marta prison in Mexico, which formed the basis of the Charles Bronson film *Breakout*.

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Fujimori threat raises stakes in Peru siege

Conditions are worsening for captives in the Japanese embassy, reports Phil Davison

Lima — A no-nonsense nationwide television broadcast by the Peruvian President Alberto Fujimori put nerves further on edge inside the besieged Japanese embassy yesterday, where government ministers and diplomats are said to have been using plastic rubbish bags as toilets. One of the two Britons held is said to have become the "leader" of a roomful of hostages.

President Fujimori left open the possibility of a military assault on the building if the 22 guerrillas did not surrender and free their 340 hostages. He flatly refused the key demand of the Tupac Amaru members — the release of at least 300 of their jailed comrades.

He called on the guerrillas to hand their arms over to mediators. "In that way, the possibility of the state using force would be ruled out," he said in a dramatic live broadcast last Saturday night. Observers noted that the wording left a commando assault very much still a threat, assuming that the rebels do not surrender soon.

There was no sign of heightened military activity in the exclusive residential San Isidro suburb, but hundreds of army commandos, police and armed plainclothes officers dotted the area.

Inside the building, with the siege nearly a week old, conditions were described by a freed congressman as "almost a cruel joke", as Mr Fujimori tested the rebels' nerves.

Each guerrilla of the Tupac Amaru Revolutionary Movement (MRTA) is guarding 15 or so hostages — all men — locked in individual rooms. With electricity cut, the captives are living in darkness at night.

Pictures released yesterday show the captives, including Peruvian government ministers, foreign diplomats, Japanese businessmen and other dignitaries, lounging or sleeping on bare floors. Most looked exhausted. A few managed smiles.

An anxious-looking Peruvian Foreign Minister Francisco

Tudela appeared to be in a kitchen with several other hostages. The Cuban ambassador to Peru was said to be suffering from a dislocated hip because of crouching on a floor but he was refusing to abandon an embassy colleague although the rebels gave him permission



Captive: Foreign minister Tudela in the siege pictures

to leave. "He is in great pain," Peruvian congressman Javier Diez Canseco, released earlier in the week, told reporters.

"After the running water was restored, the generator ran out of fuel so there was no power for the pump. It's a major hygiene problem. The hostages are using plastic bags as toilets," the congressman said.

The local head of the International Red Cross, Michel Minig, spent the night in the seized residence, apparently to see if there was any reaction by the guerrillas to President Fujimori's message broadcast. "Everything is normal. There has been no reaction up to now," Mr Minig said when he came out yesterday.

"We thought we could die at any moment," said Peruvian

university professor Javier Sota Nadal, released last Friday night after three days of captivity. He said David Griffith, one of two British citizens being held, had taken over the role of "leader" of their room full of hostages.

"He was organising the distribution of food, water and toilet trips," Mr Sota Nadal said. The hostages apparently had to resort to plastic bags when portable toilets allowed in earlier were full or in use.

Mr Griffith, in his mid-forties and general manager of Lima's Hotel Las Americas, was born and brought up in Peru and holds dual nationality. The other British hostage is Roger Church, 50, deputy head of the embassy here. The embassy has had no word on his condition.

In a message he got out by two-way radio, permitted by the guerrillas, Mr Tudela said the rebels were serious, polite and did not swear. They had

but not one, he said. The Foreign Minister said it was vital for his colleagues on the outside to find a way to communicate directly with the rebels. The Education Minister Domingo Palermo was going to and from the building, with Mr Minig, but the process of passing messages was slow.

In another radio contact on Saturday, rebel leader Nestor Cerpa promised gradually to release further hostages — "those not linked with the government".

Outside a police cordon, but within hearing of the hostages, a local choir sang "The Little Drummer Boy" and other Christmas songs to lift their spirits. Two women who described themselves as "humble Peruvian citizens", walked up and down past dozens of film crews, carrying a bible and a large cross and saying prayers. "We are praying for the Virgin Mary to bring us a Christmas miracle, a



A file picture of Nestor Cerpa (above), leader of the occupation of the residence, where hostages are shown (below right) in a photo released by Japan's Kyodo News. The man in a chair is Moises Pantoja, head of Peru's Supreme Court. Photographs: AP

peaceful end for the hostages and their families," said one.

Yesterday, thousands of people held a Peace and Solidarity March to the police cordon near the residence. They wore white ribbons, carried white balloons and sported "I love Peru" badges. Most were from official organisations, apparently part of a campaign by Mr Fujimori to show that he has public support. "A terrorist group cannot impose itself on 23 million people," he said in his broadcast.

Japan's Foreign Minister Yukihiko Ikeda, who met Mr Fujimori and mediators here at the weekend, backed the Peruvian President's stand. Peru would need Japan's agreement for any assault on the residence, which is legally Japanese territory.



significant shorts

US tries to revive Middle East talks

President Bill Clinton's Middle East peace envoy said he was meeting Israeli and Palestinian leaders in hopes of resuscitating talks on Hebron and Jewish settlements.

"The important thing that I am trying to do is to re-energise the peace process and then be in a position to go back in a couple of days to report back to the President," Dennis Ross said. Mr Ross held meetings with the Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, in Jerusalem and with Palestinian President, Yasser Arafat, in self-ruled Gaza. His last mediation effort collapsed in October. Mr Arafat, who earlier cast doubts on Mr Ross's objectivity, said after meeting the US envoy yesterday: "It was very constructive and fruitful and an important meeting. We discussed how to push the peace process forward in all means." *Reuter - Jerusalem*

Romans pay tribute to Mastroianni

Marcello Mastroianni was hurried after a rousing open air funeral service in the heart of Rome. Hundreds of Italians packed a square on top of the Capitoline hill for the ceremony.

Mastroianni's widow, Flora Carabella, their daughter



Barbara and actress Sophia Loren (above) sat to one side as friends paid tribute to the film idol who died last week, aged 72. It was nearly 40 years since Mastroianni had immortalised Rome's exuberance in Federico Fellini's film *La Dolce Vita*, and he remained loved in the city. "A chapter in my life has closed," said Ms Loren. "For 20 years we shared so many films, friendship, life." *Reuter - Rome*

Serbs set up 'free' councils

Opposition leaders in Belgrade introduced a new weapon in their struggle against the Serbian President, Slobodan Milosevic — "shadow" governments for dozens of municipalities.

The Union of Free Cities and Municipalities of Serbia was formed ahead of new protest marches directed against Mr Milosevic and his decision to annul election results in towns won by the opposition. *AP - Belgrade*

Greek road protest lifted

Farmers lifted their road and rail blockades which had crippled Greece and let land transport move freely for the first time in 24 days. It was a victory for socialist Prime Minister, Costas Simitis, who had refused to yield to the farmers' demands over subsidy cuts in his austerity budget. *Reuter - Athens*

Prison revolt crushed

Security forces used teargas, water cannon and a bulldozer to storm a prison in Jessore, Bangladesh, crushing a revolt by inmates which left at least five prisoners dead, police said. More than 60 people were injured. *Reuter - Dhaka*

Grumpy Santa

A retired electrician who has played Santa Claus for more than 20 years was charged with assault for allegedly slapping a 7-year-old cub scout who had tugged his beard. Roy Keiser, 65, apparently became angry after scouts accused him of being a fake. *AP - Plainfield, New Hampshire*

Liberated Russia becomes a giant domain of the insane

Helen Womack
Yelets, central Russia

A middle-aged man, smart in a black overcoat and red velvet scarf but with an odd pudding-bowl haircut, waved as my car drew up outside the Home for Incurable Mental Patients in Yelets. Here was a rarity, a visitor. "I am Vasily Knyazev. I am a dissident," he announced.

The home's doctor, Stanislav Golipov, did not prevent Mr Knyazev from speaking out. On the contrary, he encouraged him to tell his story. "My wife betrayed me," he said. "She wanted to get her hands on my fat. So she put me in the mental hospital in Lipetsk [a nearby town]. I complained to the prosecutor, so the doctors falsely diagnosed schizophrenia and sent me here. There are other normal people in Lipetsk. I can give you lists of names. They have put me in the madhouse illegally. I am a normal person. I have higher education. I used to be a driver, first class... Now I wash the floors and feed the cows."

Dr Golipov said afterwards: "Absolutely bonkers. He was violent to his wife. But he could be released if there was somebody to keep an eye on him. I have told him that if his brother comes to collect him, he can go. But the brother does not come. He's not a poor man. He brought several million roubles with him when he came to the home. But nobody cares about him."

Dr Golipov admitted that in Communist times political dissidents were neutralised in mental hospitals, although he said he had

not personally been involved in the abuse of psychiatry. "It mostly happened in Moscow. I was just a provincial doctor." Since 1992 Russia has had a law making it impossible to commit a person without proper medical evidence, and a court order. "If someone is here," said the doctor, "it is either because he is a danger to himself or others... or simply because he has nowhere else to go." Conditions in the home were basic but no worse than in many

There seems little difference between inmates and the disoriented population

provincial Russian hotels. Rooms, shared between two, were clean after recent redecoration. Some Western medicines were available. The staff toilet was a hole in the ground, shielded by a metal box, in the middle of a field. But then in my hotel, the best in Yelets, a rat scuttled in the bathroom.

There were some severely handicapped people in the home. Yet on the surface, others seemed more or less normal. Pasha and Petya, in their twenties, were rejected by their parents and grew up in children's homes from where, aged 18, they were transferred to the mental home. "We call them 'carnival children'," said the doctor.

"The unwanted children of drunks." They were not very bright but could have lived in society if only anybody wanted them. Now they are hopelessly institutionalised. Petya said: "I had a family once but no one visits me. Who needs me?"

Dr Golipov said: "The whole of Russia is a giant lunatic asylum. But yes, my patients are madder in the sense that they lack commonly accepted logic; they suffer distortions of perception."

The home had a secure cell, for use if patients became violent but mostly they wandered freely. The most trusted ones were allowed to go into town to spend their state benefits, around £7 a month.

One patient took me to one side in the garden and said the management stole food and clothes donated for the patients. They also shut patients up while they had drinking parties and made exclusive use of the sauna, which was supposed to be for the inmates, he said. It might be true; it might not.

The light of the short winter day was fading. The inmates had been shut up for the night. At an upper window they stood in a row, waving goodbye.

Once, freethinkers were locked up in Russian mental institutions, so they could not challenge the totalitarian society outside. Now, free spirits are no longer locked away. Instead, there sometimes seems to be little difference between the plight of the disoriented inmates, and the equally disoriented and poverty-stricken population out in the wider Russian world.

Bulgaria faces new power fight

Adrian Bridge
Central Europe Correspondent

Having spent the best part of the year reeling from an economic crisis which has seen the value of the national currency plummet, prices soar and bread queues for the first time since 1989, Bulgarians had hoped their *annus horribilis* had no more surprises in store.

No such luck. As the person blamed for many of the country's woes, the Prime Minister, Zhan Videnov, decided at the weekend that enough was enough and that he and his cabinet would resign forthwith. In one fell swoop, economic problems were compounded by a full-blown political crisis.

Mr Videnov's announcement, during a special con-

gress of the Socialist Party (reformed successor to the Communists), unleashed a power struggle between those anxious to implement economic reforms and those keen to block them. Whoever wins will face opposition calls for fresh elections.

"Mr Videnov's departure undermines the total helplessness of his government and party," said Ivan Kostov, leader of the opposition Union of Democratic Forces. "Now there are better chances to find a way out of the current crisis... through early elections."

The Socialist Party romped to victory in parliamentary elections two years ago after promising to cushion the impact of market reforms. Instead of cushioning reforms, however,

the government stalled on them, plunging the country into its worst economic crisis since Communist times and leaving it even further behind its former Warsaw Pact allies.

While countries such as Poland and Hungary are knocking on the door of Nato and the European Union, Bulgaria still appears to be closer to Moscow than Brussels and has attracted the lowest level of foreign investment in the region.

The government's failure to meet reform targets, including the closing or restructuring of loss-making state enterprises, earlier this year led to the suspension of funding from the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, moves which themselves precipitated a run on the national currency,

the lev, which has fallen sevenfold against the dollar.

The result has been catastrophic: queues for bread (due to wheat shortages) and a rush for hard currency at banks and almost daily price rises in the shops (annual inflation is set to reach 280 per cent).

On top of that, corruption and crime are rampant, as exemplified by the killing in October of the former prime minister Andrei Lukanov, believed to have been about to give details of high-level government corruption.

Not surprisingly, seasonal cheer is in short supply in Sofia. But there is still some room for humour. "Have the Bulgarian people reached the bottom yet?" runs a current joke. "Yes, but they're digging deeper."

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Hong Kong: Handful of electors choose pro-Peking stalwarts for new council

Credibility gap for China's puppets

Stephen Vines
Shenzhen

The normally unassuming left-wing trade union leader, Tam Yiu-chung, grinned broadly and waved two outstretched arms to celebrate his victory. Having been defeated by a wider electorate last year, he topped the poll of 399 hand-picked "electors", approved by China to select the members of a Provisional Legislative Council to rival the existing body.

The trouble with the existing body, as far as China is concerned, is that too many people were allowed to vote.

Yesterday, the victors and the defeated were contemplating a result hailed in China's official media as guaranteeing a smooth handover of power from Britain to Peking in almost six months' time.

According to a commentary

'The pro-China camp don't really agree on anything except their opposition to the British'

which appeared in China's leading newspapers, most of Hong Kong's people are backing the new body.

But many of the defeated candidates are taking a more jaundiced view, despite the fact that the 70 who were unsuccessful went through the same vetting process as the 60 who were elected, in order to secure China's approval for their candidature.

As things turned out, three-quarters of the successful candidates came from among the 399 voters who selected them. Candidates who were not members of the selection body were even denied access to the hotel where the selectors were staying in the Chinese border town of Shenzhen.

They are now privately offering a foretaste of the troubles which lie ahead. One put it this way: "Before Britain leaves," he said, "it is good enough for us all to be pro-Peking, but afterwards pro-Peking won't mean anything, that's when you'll see all the squabbling breaking out because the so-called pro-China camp don't really agree on anything except their opposition to the British."

The new legislature has what may be regarded as a token opposition, consisting of six members previously associated with the pro-democracy camp. The

overwhelming majority are old style pro-China stalwarts and recent converts who used to be bastions of the British establishment.

They will certainly not be a thorn in the side of the Chinese government. But they will have to struggle to gain credibility, not just because they were chosen by such a small group of people, but also because they are far from representing the brightest and best in Hong Kong politics.

Many of those firing that description are in the pro-democracy camp which had majority backing in the existing legislature but will be absent from the new body.

An additional complication is that the Provisional Legislative Council will have to meet in Shenzhen because China is worried that the democrats will challenge its legitimacy in the courts if it sits in Hong Kong. China also wants to avoid the inevitable protests which would accompany sittings in the colony.

However, Shenzhen is far from an ideal choice of venue. It is a typical frontier town, hiding its wild west characteristics behind gleaming skyscrapers.

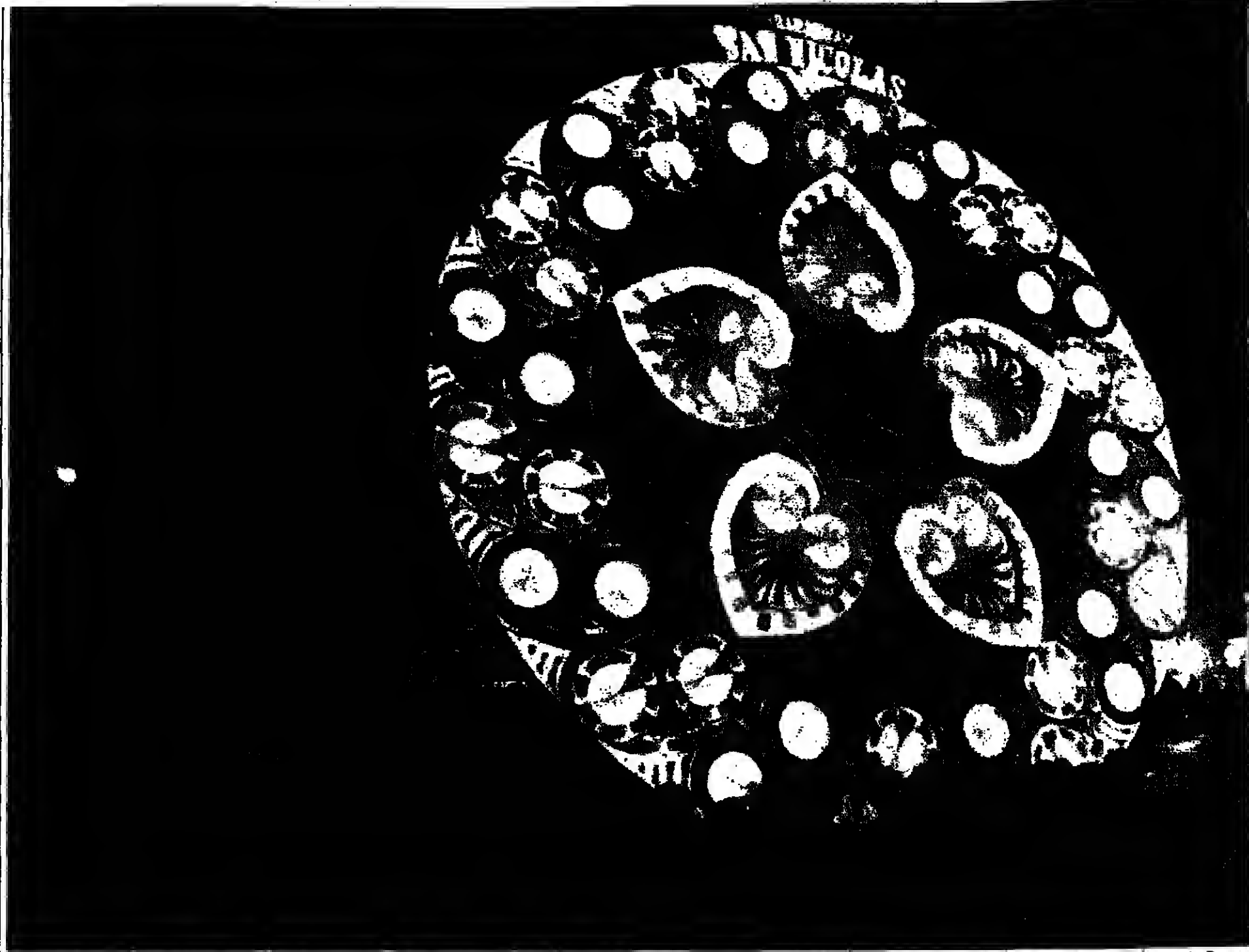
The city hailed by China's paramount leader, Deng Xiaoping, as an example of economic development also seems to be a home to uninhibited prostitution, and a place where drug dealing takes place on an alarming scale.

The hotel chosen for the selectors to stay in has a particularly notorious reputation for being populated by a large army of prostitutes. Indeed, on the eve of the poll a number of them turned up at the hotel to find it sealed off to the public because members of the selection committee were "working". "We're trying to work too," objected one of the women.

Meanwhile, Britain's promise of mobilising international support against the new body has produced immediate backing from the United States and Australia. The Americans described the establishment of the Provisional Legislative Council as a "very worrisome development".

Yesterday, Australia's foreign minister, Alexander Downer, said: "The maintenance and development of democratic political institutions [are] important factors in Hong Kong's continued success as an international business centre."

However, mindful of the trading consequences, it is unlikely that any of Britain's allies - or indeed Britain itself - will follow up these protests with any form of action against China.



Light relief: A Christmas lantern on display in San Fernando, the Philippines, during a competition for the best entry, a symbol of unity among residents Photograph: Reuters

Descendants of Hungary's last emperor climb ladder to power



On the way out: Emperor Franz Josef, one of the last of the Habsburgs to rule Photograph: Hulton Getty

Do the Habsburgs want the crown? One says 'never say never', reports Adrian Bridge

Budapest — In what must rank as one of the most unlikely political comebacks of the century, descendants of the last Habsburg emperor are once again making their mark in the territories their family ruled for hundreds of years.

Not surprisingly, the comeback revolves around the cities of Vienna and Budapest, the twin centres of power in the latter years of the Austro-Hungarian empire, which at its peak stretched from the Adriatic to what is now Ukraine.

The most striking example of the trend is the appointment last week of Georg von Habsburg, the 32-year-old grandson of Emperor Karl I, to the position of Hungary's ambassador for European integration.

In neighbouring Austria, the traditional heart of Habsburg power, Georg's brother, Karl, 35, was recently elected to represent the country in the European Parliament. In addition, he serves as president of Austria's branch of the Pan-European movement.

The appointment in Budapest, where Karl I and his predecessor Franz Josef I both held the title King of Hungary, marks the first time a Habsburg has been given an official post in the country since the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian empire in 1918 following defeat in the First World War.

In addition to coming as a surprise, the move is full of historical irony. While Georg von Habsburg's predecessors did all they could to keep

the clock turned back to an imperial past, he is now being asked to help propel the country into the future through integration with Western Europe.

And while Mr von Habsburg himself was born an archduke and remains related to many of Europe's royal families, he was formally sworn into his new post by Hungary's Socialist Prime Minister Gyula Horn, a man who spent most of his political life in the Hungarian Communist Party.

"Having a Habsburg in the position [of ambassador] will help to enhance the reputation and image of Hungary," said Mr Horn, who has made membership of the European Union and NATO Hungary's key foreign policy goals.

The new ambassador, who holds Hungarian citizenship and has worked as director of a film company in Budapest since 1993, was quick to deny that he saw his new job as a stepping stone to the restoration of the monarchy.

"Let's forget about all that," he told *The Independent*. "We have got much more important things to do now - such as bringing Hungary back into Europe. We Habsburgs are a political family. We have been in the past, and why not again in the future?"

Otto von Habsburg, 83, himself a keen advocate of the Hungarian cause, has long since renounced any claim to his father's throne. But the same is not true of all the family members.

Before his election to the European Parliament in October, Georg von Habsburg's older brother, Karl, refused to be drawn when quizzed on the issue. Asked if he believed the Habsburg monarchy could return to rule once more, he said: "Never say never again."

Newt grovels to save his hide

Rupert Cornwell
Washington

In an attempt to save his Speakership, Newt Gingrich has issued a chastened apology after being found guilty by a bipartisan House committee of violating congressional ethics rules and failing to ensure that some of his political activities did not violate federal tax laws.

The offences were listed in a 22-page report delivered by the House of Representatives ethics committee, after a two-year investigation of allegations that Mr Gingrich may have improperly used tax exempt donations to finance a highly political college course he taught until 1994. It also said the Speaker gave untruthful information during the investigation.

In response, the normally cocksure Mr Gingrich was contrite as never before. "I was over-confident and in some ways naive," he declared in a statement at the weekend, admitting he had stirred a controversy which "could weaken the faith people have in their government... In my name and over my signature, incomplete, inaccurate and unreliable statements [were provided]."

It is now up to the committee - of five Republicans and five Democrats - to decide his punishment. This could extend to formal censure or expulsion from the House. But last night a milder sanction, perhaps a reprimand, seemed more probable, enabling him to win a second term as Speaker - the first Republican to do so since 1929.

As the committee acknowledged, Mr Gingrich did not seek personal gain from his actions. Survival is not a foregone conclusion. No mercy is to be expected from Democrats, and no sooner had the committee issued its conclusions than the Gingrich camp launched an exercise to bolster support among Republicans for the 7 January vote. Though the party retained a 20-seat majority in the new House, he can afford very few defections.

Even if he is re-elected, it is clear that Speaker Gingrich of the 105th Congress will be a far cry from the brash and overweening leader of the 104th, who became the most unpopular figure in American politics. The meek admission of wrongdoing follows two years of insistence that he was the victim of a witch-hunt by Democrats, smarting from having lost control of the House.

Red flag droops in Paris as old guard marches out

Mary Dejevsky
Paris

The old guard of France's decidedly old-style Communist Party finally bowed out yesterday, on the last day of a party congress, after five days of line-by-line resistance to a programme of change.

The victor was Robert Hue, the party's candidate in last year's presidential elections, who was able to stamp his genial pragmatism on the party for the first time.

Fate played its part: Georges Marchais, who led the party in its pro-Moscow course until well after the fall of the Berlin Wall, and whose influence persisted even after he left the leadership, spent the opening day of the congress on the operating table. Yesterday, Mr Hue denied reports that his 76-year-old predecessor had had a heart attack, saying that he had "only" had a pacemaker fitted.

But the image of the ailing Comrade Marchais hung over the congress as a symbol of the party's past. A chapter in the party's history was over, and a clutch of senior figures resigned, for reasons of age, policy differences or expediency, from the policy-setting national bureau.

This was a congress shot through with ambiguities. Held in a cavernous hall beneath the futuristic arch of La Défense, it was attended by more than 1,000 delegates, many of them sporting Karl Marx beards, Lenin



George Marchais: Symbol of Communist Party's past

goatees and Mao jackets straight out of the party's glory days. Unsmiling doomsayers preferred the black-clad Che Guevara look.

Everyone sat at long tables arranged in a huge square, designed to foster a spirit of "free discussion". By Friday afternoon, they were barely beyond the "Preamble", voting page by

page, with yellow party cards lifted high in the air. It was back to basics in a big way. "What is meant by the term 'working class' in the hi-tech age?" But the votes were easy: overwhelming victories for Mr Hue and the "modernists".

The result is a policy document described as "realistic" or "Janus-like", depending who is speaking. The party continues to recognise the need for "class struggle", but will tolerate capitalist (private) money to help out the public sector. It opposes the Maastricht treaty and the single currency, but favours "European construction". It would take part in a Socialist government, but objects to key planks of the Socialist's policies on social matters and on Europe.

With an eye on its real opponents for the workers' vote - the extreme-right National Front - the party presents itself as France-centred and protectionist compared with the Socialists. The dominant colour at the congress was yellow (the colour often adopted by the National Front). The red flag was barely to be seen: just a corner on the congress banner, balanced by a tricolour, proceedings concluded with the Marseillaise and the Internationale - in that order.

El Gordo spills lottery millions on Valencia

Pamela Rolfe
Associated Press

Madrid — Christmas came early for more than 100 residents of the southern Spanish town of Valencia yesterday when the lottery that bills itself as the world's richest showered its grand prize of 33bn pesetas (\$154m) on them.

The jackpot, which Spaniards dub "El Gordo", (The Fat One) was split among the holders of the 120 tickets bearing the number 56169.

The Christmas draw dished out a total of 166bn pesetas in tax-free winnings.

The winning number was picked yesterday morning by one of the pupils of Saint Ildefonso School, Madrid, who are the stars each year of the traditional ticket draw ceremony, which is televised across the country. Student Raquel Villaciosa beamed as she sang out the coveted number.

Millions of other lottery players waited to see if they had won one of the hundreds of smaller prizes. Spaniards spent an estimated

213bn pesetas in recent weeks to take part in the country's favourite yuletide tradition, an increase of 7.6 per cent over last year.

No one knows just how many Spaniards play, because the 30,000-peseta tickets for each number are usually split among family, friends, work colleagues and club mates. Most people buy one or several of the ten 3,000-peseta shares issued for each number, though stakes can be divided down to as little as 100 pesetas.

The national lottery system was originally established as a charity during the reign of King Carlos III in 1763. But its objective gradually evolved into filling state coffers.

The Christmas lottery, easily as popular as Santa Claus, was begun in 1818. The Spanish treasury now takes a 30 per cent cut of the takings before the draw.

Spaniards, who spend more per head on gambling than any nationality except Filipinos, have steadily bought more tickets for El Gordo every year since 1978.

NOTICE TO HALIFAX STUDENT CURRENT ACCOUNT CUSTOMERS.

Halifax Building Society announces an increase in the rate of interest charged on Halifax Student Current Account unauthorised debit balances.

From 1st January 1997 the rate for unauthorised overdrafts for students will be 1.39% per month (18.0% EAR).

All other overdraft rates of interest charged remain unchanged.

EAR is the equivalent annual rate.

TRINITY ROAD
HALFAD



23rd DECEMBER 1996

A lame Major can still give peace a chance

The bombers are back on both sides of the sectarian divide in Northern Ireland. On Friday night, a gunman attempted to murder a Unionist politician as he visited his sick son in a Belfast children's hospital. It was the work of the IRA. Yesterday came the response: a bomb exploded under the car of a leading republican – the work of loyalist paramilitaries.

It sounds so familiar, so wearisome, so inevitable; armed extremists lobbing hatred at each other all over again. But what happened this weekend wasn't inevitable – nor need Northern Ireland be poised on the brink of an endless escalation of violence and hatred. If the paramilitaries and politicians – including our own Prime Minister – can raise their game and exhibit a little more political maturity and understanding than many of them have hitherto shown, then peace may still be possible.

The ceasefire by IRA and loyalist terrorists two years ago heralded a unique opportunity to pursue peace through negotiation rather than the barrel of a gun. And while the terrorists themselves have to take ultimate responsibility for the absence of peace, the British government failed to fully seize the chance for peace.

For once, Sinn Féin, the political wing of the IRA, was ready to promote its cause through peaceful negotiations. On the other side, the political repre-

sentatives of the loyalist paramilitaries turned out – surprisingly – to be ready to talk peace as well. The IRA ceasefire was left in ruins after the bombing of Canary Wharf and Manchester. But the loyalists still refrained from retaliation – until yesterday.

Even with a ceasefire, sustaining peace was never going to be easy; different sides among the terrorists, the public and the politicians still held passionate and incompatible views about the future of the province. Nevertheless, the prospects for channelling those disagreements into peaceful political negotiation were probably the best for a generation.

Given such a historic backdrop John Major's performance was lame. He moved too slowly and as his majority shrank he pandered to the unionists and hardliners within his own party. Delay, prevarication and further delay characterised the British government's political strategy. Whether it be the permanence of peace, the decommissioning of weapons or the charade of pre-talks elections, hurdle after hurdle was thrown up for Sinn Féin to jump before talks could begin. The British government failed to acknowledge the fragility of the ceasefire, and of the line Sinn Féin was trying to hold with impatient IRA activists.

Delaying talks was an even more dangerous strategy, given the time limits on the Government's freedom to



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manoeuvre. Realising that the Government majority was dwindling fast, the Prime Minister should have acted before he became too dependent on David Trimble's Ulster Unionists.

The Unionists can count even less to their credit in the missed opportunity for peace. Both Paisley and Trimble have chosen to use their power in Parliament to pursue their narrow short-term political interests: sabotaging inclusive talks. The Unionists, it seems, are so stubbornly opposed to any change, or to dialogue with those they disagree with, that they are prepared to sacrifice the chance of Northern Irish peace. They believe

they can bounce the British government into backing their intransigence.

But the game isn't over yet. Northern Ireland has not yet succumbed to widespread terror on the scale seen in the past. Just because the current British government was too slow to act at the beginning, and now has its hands tied by the Unionists, doesn't mean that a new government won't take the initiative after an election. So long as the next prime minister – of whatever party – has a big enough majority not to depend on back-room bargains, a new government could throw its weight into talks.

But if progress is to be made after a

British general election, all sides have to make an effort not to rule anything out in the next few months. If violence erupts on a huge scale in the New Year, there may be nothing left of the peace process for a new government to retrieve. The paramilitaries and their backers should have the sense to realise that escalating the violence now would not be in the interests of the people they claim to represent. All they can hope to do now is play a holding game until the election, and position themselves for political action immediately afterwards.

But John Major has a responsibility to avoid damaging the peace process, too. Expecting him to ignore his problems in Westminster for the sake of Northern Ireland is sadly unrealistic. The people of Northern Ireland will be frustrated that their security is playing second fiddle to British politics again, but nothing can change that. All we can hope for is that Mr Major will not escalate the tension – as he has done on several occasions in the past few months. It wasn't necessary to stamp so hard on the Adams-Hume initiative for a new ceasefire last month. Nor, during last week's visit to the province, did he have to make such a point of criticising the Sinn Féin president while talking of Trimble's "vigorous" advocacy. This kind of talk cuts the ground from under the feet of any would-be Sinn Féin doves. Now if

the IRA returns to its callous butchery, what chance will David Ervine, for all his impressive behaviour so far, have to restrain the loyalist paramilitaries he represents?

John Major should reflect on his position. The Unionists are unlikely to be able to do much for him for very long. And by accommodating them he risks losing something much more important: peace in Northern Ireland.

Mr Mandelson's driving ambition

Glowing, slanting eyes flicker through the darkness from Westminster. Only this time they aren't red, they are green. Labour MPs watching Peter Mandelson slip through the night in his chauffeur-driven silver Rover are seething with envy. But if this present from the Ministry of Sound night club is really a symbol of Mr Mandelson's rising status within the Labour Party, his opponents should have little to worry about. A silver Rover is not going to be enough to whisk Mr Mandelson into the job as Labour's No 2.

The real deputy prime minister is waiting – John Prescott – has a Jaguar. And he owns it himself.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

We voted for Europe, not Euro-merger

Sir: The suggestion that when this country applied for entry to the EEC we joined only an economic community with no serious political dimensions is described by the Chancellor of the Exchequer as "mythology" ("Europe's where the action is", 19 December).

There was no doubt in my mind that what I said "yes" to in the 1975 referendum was entry to a European Economic Community. I did not agree to a monetary or political union. Whether that arose from misunderstanding or misinformation I cannot say, although having followed the debate about entry closely I am doubtful if it was the former. If I was asked the same question now, my reply would be the same. Had I been asked then the question "Do you wish the UK to join a monetary or political union of European states?" my reply then, as now, would also have been an emphatic "no".

Not for one moment did I think that our then government had any intention of committing this country to anything resembling the now proposed abdication of political power, jurisdiction, monetary and fiscal policy to unelected and apparently unaccountable rule-makers, operating from a safe distance and based in a foreign state. Our parents' generation endured two horrendous wars to preserve the nation state from that very eventuality.

Over the past 20 years I have had the privilege of getting to know, and count as friends, citizens of many of the nation states that signed up to the EEC, and have seen first hand the good points as well as the less good aspects of their countries. There are many things we could copy to our definite advantage, but we do not need to jettison our national heritage and identity, let alone our political and financial independence, to do so.

Indeed, if the present policy of conformity is pursued without challenge, shops across Europe will all be selling identical Euro-goods, and we shall all be eating similar Euro-permitted foods, wearing similar Euro-clothes, driving similar Euro-cars, living and working in virtually identical Euro-style buildings, and using the same nondescript Euro-currency to purchase all these things. What a prospect for the generations to come!

KEITH W NASH
Cambridge

Sir: John Redwood ("We didn't vote for a country called Europe", 21 December) distorts history by claiming that when Britain was joining the EEC "no one told us we were joining the European Union or that the common market would gradually metamorphose into a country called Europe".

The EEC summit conference of October 1972, attended by our Prime Minister and widely reported by the British media, committed existing and future members of the EEC to the creation of a European Union by the end of 1979 and an Economic and Monetary Union by the end of 1980.

As director of the European Movement during the campaign for British entry during 1970-71 and as national organiser of the referendum campaign in 1974-75, I can confirm, from existing archives and my own records, that all our



No one deserves to be stalked

Sir: Emma Daly's article on the new Protection from Harassment Bill ("For talking, read stalking", 17 December) was astonishing.

Spurned lovers throwing things through windows, writing on or scratching cars, telephoning at all hours of the day et al are not behaving criminally, we are told; presumably because of the defence of *crime passionnel*. (It seems to be overlooked that such a defence is in fact mitigation for behaviour that has already been deemed criminal.)

"Sarah", in the case study Ms Daly gave, even concluded: "Sometimes people deserve to be harassed." Anyone who has suffered at the hands of a disgruntled ex-partner would recognise such an attitude. It is to be hoped that the new Bill will encourage the police to take such "domestic" crime more seriously, for there is no doubt that it is criminal, whatever the mitigation. PHIL McLAUGHLIN
Glasgow

Sir: For several years, I have periodically been in receipt of mail which I find absolutely terrifying, and I am sure that any "reasonable person" would agree that my fears are justified. Can you confirm that under the Government's anti-stalking legislation I will be able to sue my dentist for harassment? RICHARD A BARTLE
Colchester

Interview with Lawrence killer

Sir: I am surprised that Camilla Lowe (letter, 19 December) should have criticised our interview with her client Learco Chindamo without checking the facts with us. In attempting to "set the record straight" she has given currency to a number of misunderstandings.

Andrew Alderson, the reporter who wrote the story, contacted Mrs Chindamo to ask about her son. He told her he was a *Sunday Times* reporter and they had a friendly conversation, so much so that Mrs Chindamo suggested to Andrew that he speak directly with her son about the murder of Philip Lawrence. She gave Andrew the telephone number at Glenhorne Youth Treatment Centre; until then we did not know where he was being held.

Once he spoke to Learco Chindamo, he made it immediately clear that he worked for *The Sunday Times*. Learco Chindamo then agreed in the interview. I cannot agree that our interview conveyed the impression that Learco Chindamo had sought a public platform for his views.

RICHARD CASEBY
Managing Editor
The Sunday Times
London E1

Sad tidings

Sir: Richard Dawkins ("Who needs a euphemism for Christmas?", 19 December) asks, "Have you ever met an uneducated atheist?" I must report that I have.

The occasion was at a shopping centre. Present also were carol singers from a local church. This prompted the following remark: "Blimey, some people will try to get religion into everything. They're now trying to get it into Christmas." GRAHAM MUMMERY
Sevenoaks, Kent

briefings to public speakers on our behalf always stressed the political nature of European integration and the need for Europe to develop from a common market into a political union.
ERNEST WISTRICH
London NW3

Cricket bats can be dangerous

Sir: I was angered by the implication that gun club members are, by definition, more dangerous than cricketers, in your report (20 December) on the Duke of Edinburgh's remarks.

I have practical experience. As an eight-year-old I was knocked unconscious on the school playground by a carelessly wielded cricket bat. When 18 I was knocked unconscious by a hockey stick at a Christian youth centre. On the rugby field I sprained an ankle and a knee, and others have fared much worse.

In 40 years of target shooting I have never had any significant injury, and I can vouch for the fact that injuries are extremely rare. All that shooters know the potential for harm and so avoid it by safety training. The discipline amongst shooters is so good that the annual subscription to the National Small-bore Rifle Association for a club, which includes general and public liability insurance, is £40.

Please, please understand that the shooting community is just as appalled at the disgusting actions of public as the disgusting actions of public at the disgusting actions of public. Thomas Hamilton, but we are not all homicidal maniacs, as you would have your public believe.
R WINNEY
Berkhamsted, Hertfordshire

Higher education on the cheap

Sir: In his article advocating top-up fees for students, (12 December) David Walker stated that "the expansion of higher education in recent years has been paid for by the Government on the basis of reducing the amount of public money per student".

It would be more accurate to say that this expansion has been paid for by the students (who have to incur debts for the privilege of enjoying a declining quality of education) and, principally, by the staff, who have increased their workloads while experiencing a pay freeze of unprecedented length and severity.

The value of the top point of the lecturer's scale has in fact declined by 0.5 per cent in real terms over the last decade.

Mr Walker may sneer at our "agitation", but what makes him think that top-up fees would not be "clawed back" by government, leaving students worse off and staff and universities as impoverished as before? The solution is not top-up fees, but a combination of a learning bank for students and a pay review body for staff.
P K BURG
President, Association of University Teachers
London W11

Sir: I have just returned from a visit to Taiwan, Malaysia and Singapore in connection with validation of British universities are held in very

high regard in Asia and elsewhere. This is reflected in the numbers of students who take courses here. Our export earnings are substantial.

On two occasions during my visit I was dismayed to be told that the twin problems of underfunding and very high student numbers are now known throughout the world. This knowledge can only serve to discourage students from coming here. Funding restrictions are simply false economies.

BRUCE CURRY
Senior Lecturer
Cardiff Business School
University of Wales, Cardiff

Arguments for a minimum wage

Sir: The Institute for Fiscal Studies has not "published a report hostile to the minimum wage" (Letters, 16 December). The article to which Mr Corry refers recognises and describes the wide range of possible arguments in favour of a minimum wage and evaluates one of them at length, namely that it might be a good way to redistribute income from the rich to the poor. This is shown not to be the case; most of the poorest households have no members in employment. However, as the article makes clear, the fact that bad arguments exist for a policy does not imply that the policy itself is bad, merely that other arguments are needed to support it.
AMANDA GOSLING
Institute for Fiscal Studies
London WC1

Perverved policy on sentencing

Sir: I should like to draw attention to two articles in "Significant Shorts" (14 December). In one, a priest had abused his position of trust and admitted to 25 cases of indecent assault on children over a 14-year period. In the other a man had been convicted for cultivating cannabis.

In the former, damage had been done not only to the Roman Catholic Church but, far more seriously, to those children. In the latter, a therapeutic plant that people don't die from or become addicted to was being produced.

The priest got two-and-a-half years, the gardener four. I suggest that it is not only the priest that is perverted, but also the legal system that thinks we need more protection from the latter than the former.

MARK TACEY
HM Prison Exeter

Legend of the burnt battle bus

Sir: I was sorry to read in the article by Simon Edge on "by-election bruiser" Andy Ellis ("Mr Fix-it goes global", 17 December) the incorrect statement about Labour activists "burning the Liberal 'battle bus' after the Newcastle-under-Lyme by-election in 1986". The article continues: "The Liberals are said not to have complained too much because they

knew they deserved it." The truth is that they could not complain, because it was not true.

When pushed, the Liberals had to admit that there was no evidence for this at all.
MRS LLIN GOLDING MP
(Newcastle-under-Lyme, Lab)
House of Commons
London SW17

Doctor who fought abortion

Sir: Mrs P L Cohen (letter, 12 December) does not tell the full story about Dr Aleck Bourne.

Yes, in 1938 the late Dr Bourne was charged under Section 58 of the 1861 Offences against the Person Act with performing an illegal abortion on a woman who had been raped by a group of soldiers. He did it to save the sanity of the young woman in no way meant it to open the floodgates to the present abortion laws. He pleaded not guilty and was acquitted.

By 1967 Dr Bourne had become so appalled by the results of the case that he was one of the founding members of the Society for the Protection of Unborn Children and served on the executive committee until his death. He totally opposed the 1967 Abortion Act and predicted that the legalisation of abortion would lead to "the greatest holocaust in history". How prophetic his words have turned out to be after more than 4 million abortions, 98 per cent done on social grounds.
GORDON BUCHAN
Chairman, Society for the Protection of Unborn Children
Aberdeen Branch

interview

Conceived as a beacon of our cultural confidence, the Millennium Exhibition's 'dustbin-lid' home could end up as a monumental mistake. Peter Popham meets Lord Rogers, its visionary architect



Lord Rogers: an elegant bundle of passions and enthusiasms – one of the great movers and shakers in our cultural life

Welcome to the pressure dome

Less than two months have passed since the publication of Richard Rogers's plan for a millennium dome on the Greenwich peninsula in east London, but already the humorous epithets are flying: it's a dustbin lid, an alien spaceship with a cargo of ping-pong balls, an overgrown saucer held up with chopsticks and string. Meanwhile, with the opening of an exhibition in Greenwich town hall describing the plans, the murmurs of doubt about the wisdom, cost and direction of the £700m-plus project grow louder. Why has the projected cost already jumped £300m? What will Rogers's vast dome be for? How can a plastic roof, however huge, cost half a billion pounds? And (looking nervously over our shoulders) why is it that we are doing so much to mark the millennium when most other countries are apparently doing little or nothing?

Last week the opposition pitched in with its own dollop of scepticism when the Shadow Heritage Secretary, Jack Cunningham, wrote to Virginia Bot-

tomley questioning the income projections for the scheme, the lack of budgeting control and the absence of a hard figure for the commitment an incoming Labour government would be expected to meet. Labour was said to be particularly disturbed by a risk assessment that suggested the exhibition could exceed its £700m costing by £400m. There was speculation that Labour might be bracing itself to jettison the project altogether if it comes to power. On Friday, Barry Hartop, chief executive of Millennium Central, the quango responsible for the exhibition, unexpectedly announced that he was stepping down.

Against this threatening backdrop, Lord Rogers spoke for the first time last week of his vision of the Millennium Exhibition and why he believes it is a worthwhile endeavour for the nation to support.

Outside his office in Hamersmith, mist clung to the poplars, the Harrods Depository looked like the relic of an abandoned civilisation and, on

a Thames stained orange by the wintry sun, a single skulker and a small cacophony of gulls offered proof that the world had not come to an end – but pretty meagre proof. Anyone who disputes Rogers's view that the River Thames is London's most under-used asset need only peer out of his office window for confirmation.

anything Foster has done. And Rogers – tall, courtly, perennially tie-less, an elegant bundle of passions and enthusiasms – is one of the great movers and shakers in our cultural life. He slides readily and smoothly from the role of architect to that of planner, dreamer and prophet, in a way that none of his British contemporaries even attempt. If, as is persistently rumoured, he is given ministerial rank in an incoming Labour government, he will at least have no shortage of things he wants to do.

Rogers's millennium plan envisages a monstrous dome, big enough to enclose two Wembley stadiums or 13 Albert Halls, the biggest dome in the world, to be built on the tip of the Greenwich peninsula in east London, a 300-acre knob of land north and east of historic Greenwich and across the water from Canary Wharf and the other new office buildings and housing developments on the Isle of Dogs.

At present the peninsula has little going for it: owned until recently by British Gas, and used for gas storage, it is heavily contaminated and lacks infrastructure of any sort, even electricity and drains. Before the dome can be built the land will have to be decontaminated and the basic infrastructure installed. That expense accounts for a great deal of the cost of the project – Rogers says that the building itself, the "tent" or "umbrella" as he likes to refer to it, will consume only 3 to 5 per cent of the development cost – some £30m. But the

installation of this infrastructure is the underlying justification for what would otherwise be a reckless frivolity. Once the year-long millennium party is over, the Greenwich peninsula will be ripe for permanent, long-term development.

The Greenwich peninsula project is most readily understood in the larger context of Rogers's grand plan. "The most beautiful thing we have is the Thames," he says. "I want to make that once more the heart of the life of London, rather than turning our backs on it, as has happened since industry has not been able to use it. The concept we developed was based on a string – or pearls on a string, depending which party you come from. What we need to do, we said, was build up a series of urban nodes along the river, most of which already exist: strengthening existing ones, creating new nodes, all of them adding up to an overall hierarchical system."

What exactly are these "nodes"? "Nearly all the crucial monuments in London are along the river: the Houses of Parliament, St Paul's – which is a couple of hundred yards away – the Tower of London, going all the way down to Kew if you like." But there are modern nodes, too, most obviously the South Bank arts complex, which Rogers wants to enclose in a great undulating roof. "If you build up density points," he goes on, "you create desire points, too. Over the

next 10 years, the South Bank could potentially become the greatest cultural centre of the western world, in my opinion."

As Rogers sees it, these new urban nodes, these desire points, "go from the renewed Battersea power station to the Fenchurch opposite the Houses of Parliament, to our own South Bank centre development, to the new

Barcelona has now become the exemplary town in Europe if one wants to see how an historic town has coped with the end of the 20th century

Laïe at Bankside, the Globe, the Oxo Tower restaurant ... The point I'm making is that these are new centres. Our idea was to link these beads or pearls. This idea was developed before the millennium project came along, and at the time the Greenwich peninsula was just an ordinary bead like the others. But the millennium gave us concentration, and then Greenwich became a major bead, the crown or the clasp in the string of beads, because Greenwich is the gateway."

The antecedents of the Greenwich project are obvious enough: the Great Exhibition of 1851, and the Festival of Britain, 100 years later.

"When they're good, exhibitions can be of great economic and social advantage. I suppose the greatest one we had was the Great Exhibition of 1851, which first announced to the world

that we were the most advanced technological country. What it also did was to leave in London an amazing development from the V&A up to the Albert Hall – and money left over from that time is paying for people who are still going through university. It's a terrific legacy."

A modern equivalent could be Barcelona's Olympics, which had a wonderful advertisement: "The Olympics and 150 new squares" – in other words, not just the Olympics but a great public domain. Barcelona has now become the exemplary town in Europe if one wants to see how an historic town has coped with the end of the 20th century. It retrieved miles and miles of beach full of old and now useless warehouses, typical of any riverside, and turned them into the most stunning restaurants, housing, parks, offices, yachting harbours. They had the most enlightened mayor, and a very good local minister of culture, and they left a great heritage."

The Greenwich peninsula could, Rogers insists, benefit in similar ways. "It will have all the elements of an ordinary town: a very good tube station, 15 minutes from Trafalgar Square, the riverside, a great walkway along the edge of the water, a park all the way through the centre with a lot of trees, and offices, housing and shops. It will be a sustainable development which is all about people living, sleeping there, people working there, having leisure and culture there – in other words, a community. The exhibition must have the potential for social and cultural

regeneration: the Los Angeles Olympics may have balanced the books, but they didn't regenerate Los Angeles. To make it of use it has to be regeneration by which the poor are advantaged as well as the rich – it has to be an inclusive celebration. The Greenwich site is a linchpin between all sorts of areas that are very fragmented. The whole focus of what we are doing is seeing how you make new parishes."

In his tireless evangelism for planning, Rogers is true to the eternal verities of his profession. But whether this means London tick is another matter. London's "critical monuments", as he puts it, may be concentrated along the river, but none of the new ones has yet lived up to its apparent potential. Forty-five years after the Festival of Britain, the South Bank arts complex, for example, is a fine, heavily subsidised concentration of music, art, theatre and film. But as a zone of London it stubbornly refuses to come to life, and a walk along the river from, say, Hungerford Bridge to the revamped Oxo Tower is a dispiriting experience.

Rogers's answer is to roof the place and give it the climate of Bordeaux – but arguably that's beside the point. The public bits of London that really work do so in defiance of the weather, places like Covent Garden, market, Covent Garden, or Brick Lane, all of them largely exposed "to the elements. Europe's greatest renaissance has occurred in the post-industrial devastation of the East End; its annual celebration takes place in the shell of Spitalfield Market. Erupting in the aftermath of planning failure, inhabiting the neglected interstices of the city, these phenomena are joyfully parasitic on the capital's crumbling monuments. Their presence, and their energy, is the opposite of planning: in spirit, they squat."

The main difficulty one has with the Greenwich peninsula scheme is not the question of what will go inside it, nor with the underlying notion of throwing a party for the year 2000; it's that, though round, his dome is actually square. Harking back to Crystal Palace and the Festival of Britain's Dome of Discovery (which it slightly resembles), it belongs in spirit, like most architects' grander conceptions, to an age which architects enjoyed a level of respect which they forfeited long ago.

London's success and current vogue, despite the absence of planners, mayors and the rest, is because it is a splendid old edifice of a city which highly creative people deem worthy of occupying, of adapting and transforming in a manner that is usually haphazard, in the teeth of plans and planners. Given the right sort of access and incentives, these sort of people could probably work wonders with the wasteland of Greenwich peninsula, too. But whether they could find any mode of coexisting with Lord Rogers is open to doubt.

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Christmas is tacky? Blame Wagner

At this Christmas time, when greater understanding is still needed among those of different faiths, I bring you a series of Christmas tales from different religions all round the world. Today's Christmas story comes from the old Norse religion, and is called:

LOKI AND THE CAROL SINGERS

Many years ago the gods of the North were called the Aesir and lived in their own land, called Asgard. They feasted night and day, knowing they would one day engage in a mighty battle against the ice giants from the land of Jotunheim, a bit like the Duke of Wellington and the Allies celebrating at the great ball the night before the Battle of Waterloo ...

Well, that's enough historical background, and now down to the story. One day Odin, King of the Aesir, looked happily around his court, unaware even with all his magic powers that one day Richard Wagner would try to turn the whole lot into a musical, and said to his wife Frigg: "I think the party's turning out nicely."

"It's all very well for you to say that," said Frigg, "but this party has been going on for as long as I can remember, and all you have to do is drink, sing and talk and make sure everyone is having a good time, but who do you think has to look after the supply of mead and ale, and keep the nibbles going?"

"I don't know," said Odin. "Who does?"

"The servants, luckily, not me," said Frigg. "I'm just making a point, that's all."

Well, that's enough early Norse feminist propaganda, and now on with the story. As the feasting went on, the watchman from the gate of Asgard came to report that strangers were at the gate and were singing songs outside.

"Strange songs," said the watchman. "One is about a king called Wenceslas, and another about a baby in a manger ..."



Miles Kingston

"Be careful!" roared Thor. "It may be a trick by the giants."

But even Thor could see when the carol singers were brought in that these were not giants in disguise. They were mere children.

"And who is this baby of whom you sing?" asked Odin. "He is Jesus, king of the world," said one child boldly. "He tells us all what to do."

"Does he, indeed?" said Odin. "And what does he tell you to do?"

"To be meek and gentle and forgive each other," said

the boy. The Aesir burst into guffaws of laughter which shook the heavens, until the folk on earth woke and remarked to each other how uncommon thunder at the winter solstice was, then went to sleep again.

"That is no way to be a king," said Loki, god of fire and mischief. "If our king Odin were meek and gentle, he would be on the first thunderbolt out of Asgard. You are an idiot, child!"

"I forgive you for thinking so," said the boy. There was a short silence at this unexpected remark, then another roar of laughter at Loki's expense.

"You are apparently forgiven," said Odin to Loki. "Now you must repay him with a gift. These singers have come collecting money for their baby king. Do the honours for us, Loki."

"I will," said Loki. "I will give them a sack of treasure to take with them."

And so saying he handed over a big sack full of jewels and gold and diamonds, at which the carol singers opened their eyes wide, thanked him and went on their way.

"I have misjudged you, Loki," said Odin. "I thought you were incapable of a kind action."

"And so I am," cried Loki, bristling. "There is a spell upon that treasure. When they return home they will find it's been changed inside the sack into soot and rags. Just watch their fury!"

And sure enough, when the carol singers returned home, they found in the sack no sign of Loki's treasures. Instead, they pulled out a pile of valueless objects including an orange, a walnut, a piece of coal, a chocolate mouse, a gadget purporting to seal half-consumed champagne bottles, a miniature of malt whisky, a wooden spoon with a ribbon tied round it, and a flask of after-shave.

"Never mind," said the carol singers. "We will not be cross that we have been tricked. We will be grateful for what we have been given, and every year at Christmas we will give each other these gifts again."

And when Loki saw from Asgard that his trick had failed, he gnashed his teeth and sparks flew, which men call shooting stars.

We have proof: this is the land of the free

In one respect at least, the United Kingdom, along with the United States, Switzerland and Hong Kong, features at the top of a league table ranking countries in order of merit. The Heritage Foundation, a right-wing and influential Washington think-tank, has just published its ranking of nations according to 10 criteria designed to measure economic freedom. By these tests only eight countries in the world, including the UK, are said to be "free". In order, they are: Hong Kong, Singapore, Bahrain, New Zealand, Switzerland, the US, the UK and Taiwan. At the bottom of the table are Cuba, Laos and North Korea.

If we accept the economic theory driving this exercise, then we should be encouraged. The publishers of the "Index of economic freedom" argue that it is a powerful tool to explain why some countries prosper, while others lag behind. The Heritage Foundation claims that there is a significant correlation between economic freedom and the rate of economic growth. It believes that this new theory is a better explanation of economic success, or its absence, than, say, cost advantages, population growth, access to natural resources or the pace of technological change.

This leads the authors to claim that any country in the world can become rich if it wants to. If Bangladesh, for instance, immediately started to remove restrictions on its economy, then rather than languishing at No 118 in the table as it does, it could reach the standard of living currently enjoyed by Americans within 40 years.

By the same token, however, the Heritage Foundation sees foreign aid in the form of money and nothing else as useless or even harmful. Haiti and Peru have received millions of dollars from the US for 52 years yet they are poorer now than they were in the mid-1960s. Poverty is largely a condition imposed on people, the authors argue, by ill-conceived and repressive economic policies.

But formulae for economic success are like recommendations for healthy living, mostly common sense plus advice about a special diet – and ideas about the latter are always changing. Thus when the Japanese economic miracle was under way in the Sixties, Seventies and Eighties, the mystery ingredient was supposed to be the way the Japanese government guided investment to where it was most needed and got new industries going. At the time, Japan, with its high tariff walls, restrictions on foreign ownership, and licensing systems would have come out badly on the index of economic freedom. Now that Japan's arrangements are more liberal in the Anglo-Saxon sense, the country finds itself stuck in a long period of low growth.

The list of the free has some unexpected aspects. The UK is the only country of the European Union to feature. The next one down, the Netherlands, comes in at No 9 under the heading "mostly free". Germany has slipped for the



Andreas Whittam Smith

We top the 'Index of economic freedom'. But the price of liberty can be neglect

second year running, and now lies joint 20th with Ireland. France is well down.

This is the European league: 7) United Kingdom, 9) the Netherlands, 11) Denmark, 12) Luxembourg, 15) Belgium, 18) Austria, 20) Ireland and Germany, 23) Finland, 27) Sweden, 31) France, 36) Italy, Portugal and Spain, 59) Greece.

More surprising is to find that there is no necessary correlation between economic freedom and political freedom. Hong Kong, at the very top of the list, has been a traditional colony. Singapore is a one-party state. In Taiwan, about a third of all local politicians have criminal records.

In fact the higher a country's position on the index of economic freedom, the less there is for government to do. Britain, for instance, scores badly on tax rates, which are assessed as moderate to very high. To achieve "low taxes" the top rate of income tax would have to be 25 per cent or below, and low taxes are almost bound to equal low welfare.

Then so far as regulation is concerned, two of the questions asked by the Heritage Foundation are: does the government force business to subscribe to limits on the working week, paid vacations, maternity leave? Does the government force business to subscribe to strict environmental, consumer safety and worker health regulations? Such hard-nosed questions characterise American right-wing thinkers. Their notion of freedom becomes at this point what I would call neglect. You cannot ascribe merit to an economy in which, say, industrial accidents are unchecked.

Many of the criteria in this exercise are, however, interesting. Is there corruption in the customs service? To what extent does the government own businesses and industries? Can foreigners own land? Does the government provide subsidies to businesses to hold down prices? Is there corruption within the judiciary? Is a licence required to operate a business and is it easy to obtain one? How extensive is the black market? On the other hand, there seem to be no questions directed towards establishing that governments effectively police markets to remove the constant dangers of monopoly power and collusive trading.

The *Wall Street Journal*, which has co-published the report with the Heritage Foundation, noted that countries "after they have become economically liberated... tend to fall back down the scale of economic freedom". I believe that this is inevitable – and appropriate. You could rephrase the Heritage Foundation's conclusion to say that to achieve fast economic growth you pay a price in terms of absence of welfare, social cohesion and respect for the environment.

Democratic societies are unlikely to tolerate this for long stretches of time. Economic freedom and political freedom are generally complementary, but at the extremes they compete. And when pushed, I would rather be free than rich.

It's time to swing back to the Sixties

by Polly Toynbee

"I hope I die before I get old", we all sang along with Roger Daltrey back in the days when to be young was very heaven. "So how come you're all still hanging on, then?" asked a caustic young person the other day. "Easy," I said. "We ain't old yet. Not until Mick Jagger says so." The Stones (aged 211 between them) have just announced another mega-tour next year to promote a new album. The 1995 Voodoo Lounge tour (127 gigs) made \$250m profit. Jagger earned \$70m; wrinkle rock makes loads of crinkles. "It's going to be gigantic again," says Jagger's publicist. You bet.

In January, David Bowie's 50th birthday concert is requiring the building of a special extra arena in Madison Square Garden to hold 18,000. Last June in Hyde Park there were Bob Dylan, 54, Eric Clapton, 51, and The Who, whose surviving three members total 152. It's hip to be 50. If this sounds like whistling in the dark, you may be right, as my own half-century creeps up on me shortly. We are the monster generation, the post-war baby bulge, the biggest, toughest and most dominant generation there has ever been, towering over those that came before and those that come after. We cast a long shadow, and the older and the younger all stand in it, crossly and resentfully sometimes. They have a lot to resent. We are the have-it-alls, always have been, always will be until the day we die – if we ever do. Maybe no one will ever have it quite as good again.

The NHS was created as our cradle: we were its first babies. The tranquil and secure, if dead-end, Fifties nurtured our thriving childhoods. We left school and university in a full employment world. A swathe of new universities was built for us.

Optimism and hope were all about us; we could be anything we wanted to be. Harold Wilson was not "exactly a youth cult hero", but the mostly much despised Labour government in 1964 radiated change.

Whatever we thought of Labour, was it the last time anyone will believe in a new society, in a solution to every problem, in progress itself? We did. That made it a good time to be young. I don't envy my children's experience of politics so far. By 1979 hope had turned sour, and so Sixties liberalism descended into the atavistic economic liberalism of Margaret Thatcher. True individual-



Good old fiftysomethings like Jagger should get back in harness and fight for the heady, idealistic values of a better time

ism was the child of the Eighties, not of the Sixties as the current moralisers claim. In the Sixties we did our own thing – collectively. The spirit said, ideologically, we are all in this together. What each of us does, matters to the rest of us. No, it was Thatcherism that privatised the individual. Now even that idea has crumbled to dust.

Can we hope that 1997 and a new Labour government will be 1964 all over again? It takes a strenuous act of will to believe it. But perhaps there is still time to change the Zeitgeist.

For, nowadays, the vague is for moralising, stopping things,

banning things, denouncing things, a V-chip planted in the public mind to censor and censor every thought that may not pass the Disney test. Everywhere, thresholds and watersheds are being drawn in, horizons lowered, old properties brought out of the attic and dusted down. All change is a threat, not a chance, and the future holds nothing but fear.

The very word "progress" rings out as a term from a long-dead political lexicon. Retro-values rule – at least in public.

And yet the Sixties live on in the private sphere. In private, people continue to behave as

before – sex, divorce, cohabitation, soft drugs, abortion and self-determination. Liberal tolerance of the behaviour of their own nearest and dearest contrasts so strangely with the megaphone morals people choose to devour in most of the press. We live in contradictory and ambivalent times.

Why, even the Archbishop of Canterbury exhibited these same confusions in his pre-Christmas message on GMTV yesterday. He warned about the loss of traditional moral values and the advent of a "DIY morality". He said that individual should not decide their own

morality. "I want to remind people there is such a thing as objective morality." Then he called for "faithfulness in marriage or in a single lifestyle". (What did he mean? He has the same felicity with words as our Prime Minister.) But, yet again, he refused to criticise the most famous adulterer in his flock, Prince Charles. "He has struggled as many people struggle, with broken relationships." Well, there is moral relativism for you. Where is the "objective morality" in that? Quite right too. The Prince deserves the same understanding we afford to our friends. That's tolerance and fairness, not moral laxity.

DIY is exactly what we should bring our children up to do. Trust no nostrums, follow no leader blindly, obey no orders without thought, listen to Jimmy Cricket – "Always let your conscience be your guide." Oh, there may have been a lot of dope and sex in the Sixties, but we were priggish too, about the moral evils in the wicked world around us. Shudder when you listen to an old *Hair* album, at the way a search for innocence led to sanctimonious smugness. But we were into morality, no doubt about it. People always are and always will be. It is the kind of morality that changes.

So if we are in a retro frame of mind, with Mick and the rest strutting and strumming in the old way, then it is time for the good old boys and girls of the Sixties to do a bit more. Time for them all to get back in harness. It's one thing to have them up on stage doing their stuff, but what about the culture out here? Have they nothing to say any more about that?

Can anyone who met their twenties tuned in to Hendrix, anyone who shook their afro to "Wild Thing", really have succumbed to the current meaningless and frightened little homilies from our newspapers and politicians? That spirit of experiment and daring may be dormant in the fiftysomethings who now hold the reins of power – but somewhere in all their bottom drawers, (well, maybe not John Major's) there is a picture of them in an Afghan and satin flares with a bell round their neck. However much their children may clutch their sides and fall on the floor with ribald laughter, it is a picture of a better time, when we looked forward to the future. If you are buying into the Jagger turn, it is time to buy into the rest of the good old values too, and fight off the forces of reaction and suppression as we did back then.

Why Good Samaritans drove by

Is rape only real if it's on 'Crimewatch?' asks Ann Treneman of Chislehurst's commuters

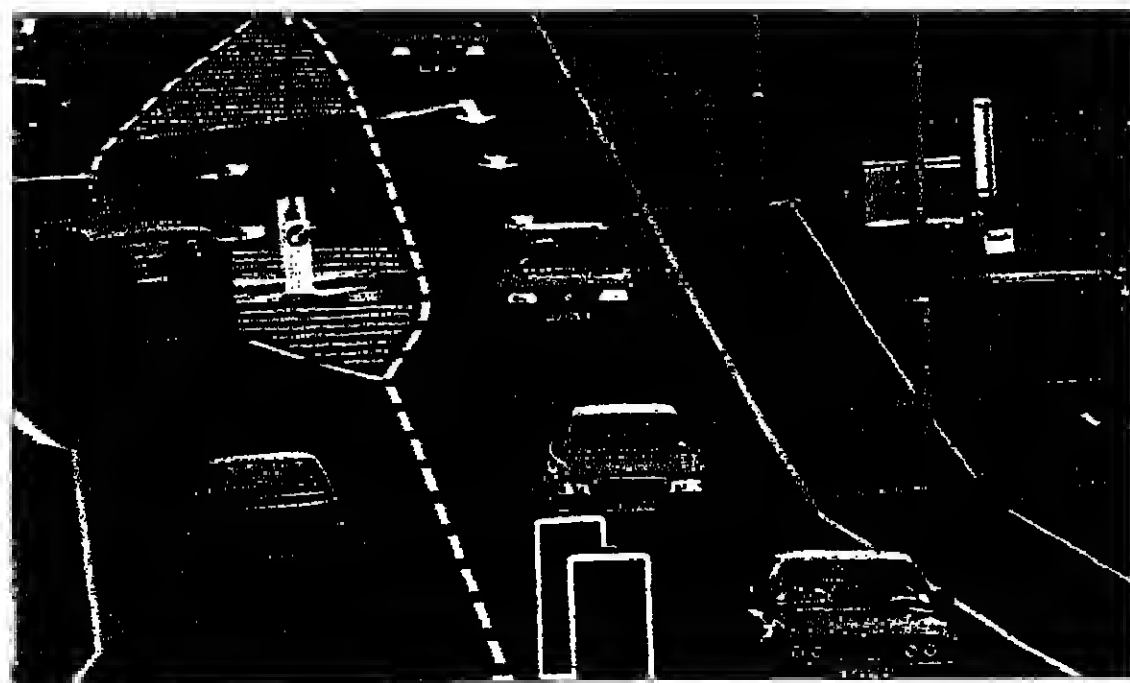
No one need feel alone walking towards Watts Lane in the south London suburb of Chislehurst at 7pm on a weekday. The traffic is heavy – I counted 44 cars per minute – and the odd bus trundles by, too. But, last week a woman was attacked for five long minutes on this pavement. That is up to 220 cars' worth of time. Any of them could have stopped or called the police. Not one of them did.

"It's an indictment of the way we live that people choose to look the other way," said a man who lives nearby. "This should shame us all. Whatever happened to the Good Samaritan?"

He is still there – in myth at least – in Luke, chapter 10, verse 30. But the Samaritan who rescued the traveller who had been stripped, beaten and left for dead by robbers on his way from Jerusalem to Jericho has changed. These days his compassion has acquired a structure. He helps at the local hospital, ladies up lunch in the soup kitchen, hys *The Big Issue*. When he is not volunteering, he is on Neighbourhood Watch.

But people say that he is not immune from fears about crime, or from the pressures of this bustling of seasons. "The Good Samaritan during this season is also the before-Christmas Samaritan," says Dr Helen Haste, of Bath University, who has studied "by-stander apathy". "It is one of those stories we are told, but it's very difficult to find out how much we really believe in its values."

We certainly like to think we do and the "see no evil" commuters of Chislehurst took a drubbing last week. "They should be ashamed of themselves" was a typical comment. And yet this is no isolated incident. Over the past year as the public has looked the other way as a 24-year-old woman was kidnapped on the Underground, and ignored the cries for help from a 15-year-old being raped in Wigan. Bystander



apathy is a disease of our time.

"I don't even know if the idea of a good citizen or Samaritan exists," says Kris Black, at the London Rape Crisis Centre. "You hear about a woman being raped and yelling out of the window, 'help me', and people turning around and laughing at her openly. My guess is that somehow there is a thing engendered in us that means that is OK to protect property, but people don't matter, somehow."

Today's good neighbour feels comfortable about protecting property. The home security market nearly tripled in size during the late Eighties and continues to boom in the Nineties. She or he belongs to one of the 150,000 Neighbourhood Watch schemes in the UK. "Today the talk is about moving from being the eyes and ears of the police to being the heart

and soul of the community," Maggie Wright, an insurance representative, told a conference on the subject.

Yet each street in Chislehurst boasts a Neighbourhood Watch and this did nothing to help the 36-year-old civil servant as she fought her attacker last Tuesday. Every inch of her face was bruised and cut, and her cheekbone broken. She could see the drivers' faces as they stared at her until, finally, she was dragged behind the prickly gorse hedge that runs along Chislehurst cricket ground, and raped.

Twenty-eight years ago in New York, Kitty Genovese also saw the faces of her rescuers turn away. Some of the 37 people who heard her cries for help responded by increasing the volume of their television sets. No one called the police, and in half an hour Kitty was dead. Subsequent research

showed that her big mistake – and that of the Chislehurst rape victim – was to be attacked on a busy street.

"As long as we think other people are around, we are less likely to act," says Professor Bibb Latane, of Florida Atlantic University, who studied the Genovese case. "Each individual looks at a worrying event and decides it may not be as bad as he fears, because others are not doing anything."

"We have this belief in our culture that we do help. In fact, we often do not," says Dr Haste. In Chislehurst this was compounded by the fact that everyone was cocooned in a car and the traffic was busy. We also find it worrying when we see a man and a woman fighting – no one likes to intervene in domestic disputes – but the main reason everyone gives is safety fears. "It's quite proper for people to

think of their own safety," says Eric Shegog, the director of communications for the Church of England. "They have other responsibilities, or maybe they are family people. So you've got to weigh up the risks, and the likelihood that you would be able to influence the situation."

But the Good Samaritan had such considerations too, and research shows that certain people do end up intervening in some way – perhaps only by calling for help – regardless of fears of traffic flow or embarrassment. They do so because they believe it is the right thing to do; they tend to have been brought up in families that gave them a strong sense of personal responsibility. They were taught that the buck does not stop with their neighbours or the next car, but with themselves.

"There has been a lot of research into people who did extraordinary things, such as helping Jews during the Holocaust," says Dr Haste. "What is striking about this is that people say: 'I did not have a choice. I'm not unusual. I'm not very brave.' That's what they feel."

Kris Black does not think she is brave, either, but she does intervene – not always with the best of results. The other night she was in a minicab when she saw a young woman being pushed to the pavement by a man. The minicab stopped and they ran over to help. "The woman was pregnant and, when she came to, it was clear she had been drinking," says Ms Black. "Then she attacked the cab driver."

Would you have intervened, or have waited for your conscience to be tickled? Police say they have finally had a good response to their appeal in Chislehurst, but no arrests have been made. Who knows, it may end up being re-enacted in *Crimewatch*. The BBC says that some 1,500 people ring in after every programme. Perhaps the Good Samaritan these days is alive and well, and just waiting for *Crimewatch* to jog his memory.

Good-bye battery



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obituaries / gazette

Yuli Khariton

Stalin did not destroy physics in the Soviet Union because physics was needed to enhance the power of the state. The academician Lev Landau, a Nobel prizewinner, remarked that the survival of Soviet physics was the first example of successful nuclear deterrence. This comment had a serious point. What the bomb saved was a small island of intellectual autonomy in a society where the state claimed control of all intellectual life.

The pioneering nuclear physicist Yuli Khariton was one of the few people in a position to ring up Lavrenti Beria (1899-1953), the chairman of the special committee on the atomic bomb and head of the secret police, and tell him that so and so was not to be called because he, Khariton, needed him. Indeed when the first Russian atomic bomb was tested on 29 August 1949, Beria embraced both Khariton and Igor Kurchatov and kissed them on the forehead. This did not prevent Khariton from recognising that Beria was both a superb organiser and a terrible, terrible man.

To be three times a Hero of the Soviet Union and a member of the congress party was quite an achievement for Yuli Khariton, who was born into the Jewish intellectual aristocracy of St Petersburg. His mother was an actress, and his father was a journalist who after the Revolution became Director of the House of Writers, an important centre of literary life. As his son's emerging eminence came

too late to save him from perishing in one of Stalin's labour camps.

In 1921, when he was still a second-year student at the Polytechnical Institute, Khariton was invited by Nikolai Nikolaevich Semenov (1896-1986) to work in the chemical physics department at the Physico-Technical Institute in Leningrad, whose director was Abram Fedorovich Ioffe.

In the relatively liberal period between the wars, Khariton was sent to Cambridge University in 1926 where he spent three years at the Cavendish Laboratory studying directly under Lord Rutherford and Sir James Chadwick. He was never to return to western Europe other than fleetingly to Germany in May 1945 as a temporary NKVD colonel, sent by Stalin to find out about the German nuclear programme and to apprehend Nazi scientists. (Fortunately, Otto Hahn and Werner Heisenberg were already safely interned at Farm Hall near Cambridge.)

Khariton returned to the Soviet Union from Cambridge to take charge of the Institute of Explosives. In September 1933, Ioffe decided to organise an All Union conference on the atomic nucleus in order to create close ties among the various Soviet centres working in nuclear physics. He also invited a number of physicists from abroad; among those who spoke were Frédéric Joliot, Paul Dirac and Victor Weisskopf, then Wolfgang Pauli's assistant in Zurich, and a future director of



Khariton: 'that weapon must not ever be used' Photograph: AP

Cern. Khariton later said: "Because at the beginning of the 1930s everyone considered nuclear physics to be a subject which had no relationship to practice or technology... the study of a topic that seemed so remote from technology and practice was far from easy and could threaten various unpleasantnesses."

Khariton and his young colleague Yakov Zel'dovich (1914-87) calculated that once a

system was close to the critical condition, the thermal expansion of the uranium (which would allow neutrons to escape from the uranium) and the release of delayed neutrons would exercise a decisive influence on the transmission to the critical state. In short, by 1938 they had an inkling of the power of chain reactions.

On 30 July 1940, a "commission on the uranium problem" was established. Three

years earlier Khariton had published a paper on isotope separation by the centrifuge method in which he had argued that this method was only rational for small quantities. His work was very similar to that being conducted in the West by Otto Frisch and the late Sir Rudolph Peierls. They had quite separately come to the same conclusions - not through espionage.

Khariton and Zel'dovich provided the most extensive discussion of chain reactions to be published at the end of the 1930s; the Americans were already taking steps to keep their work relatively secret. Indeed so little idea had the Soviets of the military use of chain reactions that for the next four years Khariton turned his mind to developing anti-tank grenades and cheap, surrogate explosive substances.

At the end of the Second World War Khariton was sent to Germany in order to take back to the Soviet Union men like Gustav Hertz, who in 1925 had received the Nobel prize with James Franck for experiments in electron collisions, and Peter Adolf Thiessen, head of the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute of Physical Chemistry in Berlin, who had been in charge of chemical research and development in the Third Reich.

Hiroshima changed everything. The Soviets immediately decided to look at sites suitable for chain reaction work and chose the town of Sarov - or rather a carefully

guarded "zone" which included the town, the former Sarovskaya Pustyn monastery, and the research and development establishments which became known as Arzamas 16, 60km to the north. It was some time known as the "Volga office" as it was on the Volga river, but more often, perhaps inevitably, as "Los Arzamas" - a reference to the American competitor at Los Alamos, New Mexico.

When in 1946 Khariton and his group moved to Arzamas 16, several churches were still standing as well as the monks' own living quarters. It was in these cells that the first laboratories were set up. Prisoners from a nearby labour camp built new laboratories and houses.

I met Yuli Khariton only once, which was more than virtually any living politician or scientist in the western world, other than David Shoenberg FRS, fellow of Cetus and former director of the Mond Low Temperature Laboratory. The occasion was in March 1964, when the Russian Academy received at their lovely old palace in Moscow the Labour Party science delegation, which consisted of Lord Bowden, Professors David Shoenberg, Colin Adamson, Anthony Bradshaw, and myself. The talking was done by the academicians Matias Keldysh, Petr Kapitza and Sergei Milionchikov.

As we dispersed, an ascetic, gaunt, dapper man of some 60 years with piercing yet kindly eyes, who had not opened his

mouth, sidled up to me and said very quietly: "I see you were a student at King's College, Cambridge - how is Edward Shire?" E.S. Shire was the Physics tutor at King's and a distinguished member of the Cavendish. I told my questioner about Shire and felt that he had a genuine affection for his friends in Cambridge from 40 years ago. But he avoided my best efforts to find out who he was. Subsequently I learned that he was Yuli Khariton - and, said our host, Sergei Gvishiani, chairman of the state committee and the Prime Minister Aleksei Kosygin's son-in-law, in somewhat reverential tones: "He is one of the greatest thinkers in the Soviet Union." Later when I told this story to the late Lord Penny he said: "You have met two of the five Leningrad physicists beginning with K - Petr Kapitza, Yuli Khariton, Vitali Khlopov, Isaac Kikoin and their leader Igor Kurchatov."

The somewhat hushed tones had doubtless in them an element of the distinction of Khariton - but they also reflected the fact that for a quarter of a century Khariton's immediate boss had been Lavrenti Beria. In turn Khariton was for 18 years (1950-68) the immediate boss of Andrei Sakharov, later to be the campaigner for human rights but at that time the theoretician-extraordinaire at Arzamas 16.

To comprehend the truly extraordinary story of Khariton's relations with Beria, with Stalin - who ordered him at all

times to have a personal body-guard such as his value - and with Kurchatov, father of the Russian H-bomb who died while sitting on a bench in a park on 7 February 1960, while he was actually talking to Khariton about a possible visit to France, it is necessary to read David Holloway's remarkable book *Stalin and the Bomb* (1994).

Khariton himself suffered great strain before the test of the hydrogen bomb on 1 November 1952. It was enhanced by Beria sending two leading mathematicians, Mikhail Lavrent'ev and Alexander Ilushin, to Arzamas 16, apparently potential replacements for Khariton and his deputy should the test fail. However the final test on 12 August 1953 was an unqualified success.

Afterwards Kurchatov and Khariton walked out and were very upset about the mounds of earth that had been thrown up even though the explosion had taken place more than 4km above ground.

When they were asked what was wrong they said: "That was such a terrible, monstrous sight, that weapon must not be allowed ever to be used."

Tam Dalyell

Yuli Borisovich Khariton, physicist: born St Petersburg 27 February 1904; Director, Institute of Chemical Physics and Explosives, Leningrad 1929-39; Scientific Director, Arzamas-16 Research Institute 1946-92; married (one daughter); died Arzamas 19 December 1996.

Dr Edward Hare

No psychiatrist has ever applied the methods of historical research as powerfully as Edward Hare in his explorations of the waxing and waning of psychoses over the last two centuries. Thus he elucidated their likely causation.

He was one of a rare breed of doctors, a clinician who devoted himself primarily to the advancement of medical knowledge while holding a full-time post in the National Health Service. He was appointed consultant physician to the Joint Bethlem Royal and Maudsley Hospital in 1957, a title traditionally given to consultant psychiatrists at this postgraduate teaching hospital whose origins go back to the time of Henry VIII.

He adopted an exemplary personal style in his researches and worked largely single-handed. He began with observations which had escaped the attention of others, often because they appeared too commonplace. He then systematically pursued two or three main themes doggedly over the course of several years, applying his own kind of disciplined scholarship and reasoning.

The son of a Church of England clergyman, Hare read Biochemistry at Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge, and then decided to study medicine, completing his medical degree at University College, London in 1943. He soon entered psychiatry and distinguished himself by winning the Gaskell medal of the Royal Medical-Psychological Association. He decided to concentrate on epidemiological psychiatry and confirmed the high rates of schizophrenia in the central parts of Bristol, in order to test the hypothesis that schizophrenia is caused by social stresses.

He later showed that patients who suffered from the major psychoses, including schizophrenia, were more likely to have been born during the first quarter of a year when

compared with the normal population. He concluded that winter-born children are prone to nutritional deficiencies or infections which in turn may damage the constitution and facilitate the manifestations of severe mental illnesses. This was the first clear association between a well-defined measurable environmental factor and the causation of schizophrenia.

In a fine series of studies in which he proved beyond doubt the mutability of disease, Hare displayed his mastery of deductive skills. His data showed that there had been a natural decline in deaths from dementia paralytica from 1901 to 1957. This disease is due to syphilitic infection of the brain and became treatable with penicillin in 1945, but he demonstrated that the decline in its prevalence could not be attributed to improvements in medical treatment. He ingeniously postulated a gradual reduction in the virulence of the syphilitic organism in the absence of direct laboratory proof.

Further research into the changes of mental illness over historical time produced startling findings. Patients admitted to the 19th-century mental asylums with acute attacks of "insanity" were noted to suffer from high mortality rates, and those who survived often underwent profound deterioration (at that time called "dementia"). During the 20th century, and more so during recent decades, the prognosis of serious mental illnesses has improved. Hare argued that this improvement had begun well before the introduction of progressive forms of care and modern pharmacotherapy. He concluded that diseases change with time and that psychiatric diseases change more quickly than others because the expression is largely psychological and follows changing fashions in the mode of expressing mental distress.

The culmination of Hare's historical research was revealed in his 1982 Maudsley lecture in which he marshalled the evidence that there had been an epidemic of "insanity" during the second half of the 19th century, and probably during the first half as well. This was what led to a growing demand for asylum accommodation and a constant need to build new asylums between 1840 and 1920. He argued cogently that this increase in mental illness was principally due to a rise in dementia praecox, now known as schizophrenia. He concluded that purely genetic explanations for schizophrenia were insufficient and it was necessary to exam-

ine also specific environmental factors of a physical kind which had yet to be found. Among these he favoured an infective cause.

Hitherto, Hare's contributions to our understanding of mental illness have been insufficiently recognised. His work was that of a builder who concentrated on laying sure foundations on which others could build further. Psychiatrists who are aware of his evidence pointing to an infective cause for schizophrenia have in recent years channelled their energies into this field of research. Others who understand his concept of the mutability of disease have been emboldened to describe new forms of mental illness and rewrite clinical descriptions which have become outdated.

On the whole, Hare preferred to study groups of patients rather than individuals. An exception was his subjective observations on his attacks of migraine. They were preceded by premonitory symptoms consisting of flashes of light moving from the centre to the periphery of his field of vision. He recorded this march of events by the simple means of a ruler and a sheet of white paper on which he projected the spreading semicircle of flashing lights. The consistent pattern and duration of this disturbance led him to conclude that there had been an interference with a basic physiological process in his brain.

Anyone who knew Edward Hare appreciated that he was a man of singular modesty. He acknowledged that as a young psychiatrist he had little ambition but he was encouraged to change when Professor Aubrey Lewis urged him to join the staff of the Maudsley. He shared with this mentor the quality of scepticism which he defended as merely the wish to look more closely.

During the last 25 years of his life, including his most scientifically productive years, he enjoyed the unfailing support of his wife, Fily. Without her help he would have been unable to present his research findings in Vancouver (1990) and Japan (1993). He is survived by her and by his daughter Anne from a previous marriage.

Gerald Russell

Edward Henry Hare, psychiatrist: born Stoke-on-Trent 21 August 1917; consultant, Bethlem Royal and Maudsley Hospital 1957-82; FRCPsych 1971, FRCP 1973; Editor, *British Journal of Psychiatry* 1972-77; married 1945 Margaret Middleton (died 1962; one daughter); 1971 Fily Gabbard died London 8 December 1996.



Hare's deductive skills



A weaver of legends and tales: Caswell at work on a painting of Robert Burns's 'Tam O' Shanter', 1996

Photograph: The Courier, Dundee

Edmund Caswell

Edmund Caswell settled on his profession via a quite unexpected route. It was not until the age of 38 that he committed himself to becoming a painter.

He was born in 1938 in Bangalore to a military civil service family, "returning" to England when he was seven. He eventually gained a scholarship to study at the Coventry School of Art. However his focus shifted and he took a degree in husbandry and manure. He earned a living in a variety of ways: farming, shoemaking, a six-year period in the Royal Artillery near horses which he loved, scene-painting, building, decorating and as an illustrator. He studied part time at the Heatherly and Sir John Cass schools of art and eventually, in 1978, gained a place in the fine art department of Hornsey School of Art, at the then Middlesex Polytechnic.

It was abundantly apparent that Caswell did not fit into any category that such a department might expect. He used the place

as his own - as indeed all people studying should, it was just that his manner was particularly vigorous. He came to learn to draw and paint in order to fulfil his driving ambition to meet adequately the poetic imagery teeming in his mind. He paid no attention whatsoever to the fashions of the art world that are reflected in art schools. He had his vision; he let others search around for theirs. He was a weaver of legends and tales and he set about doing this in drawing, painting, print-making and even film.

This was a time when the course had first become involved with work in the community - in schools and hospitals - and when students of fine art could step out of their academic isolation and into the world of people, hoping to share experience through art. In his first year at Hornsey, Caswell took up an opportunity in a local hospital, in the geriatric ward of Colindale Hospital, Middlesex. The result was sensational, both in

human and artistic terms. Through the carnival mural that he created Caswell discovered his métier: to give pictorial articulation to poetry and story.

It was therefore not difficult to realise that Caswell was the person to take up the challenge of a mural for the Great Ormond Street Hospital for Sick Children when the hospital contacted Hornsey. Caswell knew Great Ormond Street's connection with J.M. Barrie's book *Peter Pan*, and this became the theme for the mural.

He commandeered studio screens to set up paper for a full-size cartoon of the 728 by 817 project. His manner of proceeding was not entirely popular but the drawing showed a spectacular command of theme, idea and draughtsmanship. He gained the commission and set to work on site.

It took eight years to complete, plus a further six weeks seven years later. He worked on it largely from 8pm to 8am to keep out of the way of hospital

"traffic". His sheer talent, energy and determination produced a stupendous work. It was unveiled by Lady Callaghan of Cardiff in December 1988 to celebrate the passing of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Bill that gave the royalties from *Peter Pan* to the hospital for ever.

In 1992 he created a series of paintings depicting the scenes that inspired the music of "Picturables at an Exhibition" by Musorgsky. The pianist Norman Beadie had invited him to produce these paintings originally with the aim of using them in an animation video, but the whole scheme was eventually performed in 1993 in a multimedia environment at the Bonar Hall at Dundee University with images projected from Caswell's work on to screens while Professor Beadie played the piano, alongside a specially choreographed dance performance.

Recently Caswell was commissioned to paint an interpretation of Robert Burns's "Tam

O' Shanter", and in January this year Phil Gaffie, the MP for Ayr, hosted an exhibition of images of Tam O' Shanter at the Houses of Parliament, which included Caswell's work. The painting he was working on at the time of his death was of Jesus Christ and Mary Magdalene in the Garden of Gethsemane, commissioned for the Church of St Mary Magdalene, Dundee.

Caswell was not a comfortable man. He held views emphatically, even dogmatically. He was more than a little self-willed. However his immense heart and loving nature made him an adorable person. He was what is known as "a character" but with real depth of character. He needed the great support of his wife Henny King to help him sail through the stormy oceans of his moods.

Richard Robbins

Edmund Caswell, artist: born Bangalore 12 August 1938; married 1986 Henny King; died 1 December 1996.

Announcements for Gazette BIRTHS, MARRIAGES & DEATHS (Births, Adoptions, Marriages, Deaths, Memorial services, Wedding anniversaries, In Memoriam) should be sent in writing to the Gazette Editor, The Independent, 1 Canada Square, Canary Wharf, London E14 5DL, telephoned to 0171-293 2011 (24-hour answering machine 0171-293 2012) or faxed to 0171-293 2010, and are charged at £6.50 a line (VAT extra). OTHER Gazette announcements must be published in writing (or faxed) and are charged at £10 a line, VAT extra.

Changing of the Guard
The Household Cavalry Mounted Regiment mounts the Queen's Life Guard at Horse Guards, 11am.

Birthdays
Emperor Akihito of Japan, 63; Queen Silvia of Sweden, 53; Sir Franklin Berman, legal adviser, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, 57; Mrs Christine Bicknell, former chairman, CSEB, 77; Sir Norman Blegg, banker, 89; Lord Blake, former editor, *Dictionary of National Biography*, 80; Mr David Davis MP, Minister for the European Union, 48; Mr Peter Davis, chief executive, Prudential Corporation, 54; Mr Maurice Demham, actor, 87; Sir Colin Fieking, consultant in research systems, 78; Mr Lester Croverton, rock guitarist, 47; Mr John Guinness, chairman, British Nuclear Fuels, 61; Yusuf Kadir, portrait photographer, 88; Mr Graham Kelly, chief executive, the Football

Association, 51; Miss Belinda Lang, actress, 43; Mr Christopher Lawrence, goldsmith, silversmith and modeller, 60; Sir Roger Neville, former chief executive, Sun Alliance, 65; Miss Joan Quennell, former MP, 73; Herr Helmut Schmidt, former Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany, 78; The Rev Christopher Turner, former headmaster, Dean Close and Stowe Schools, 67; Mr Rayner Unwin, chairman, Unwin Enterprises, 71.

Anniversaries
Bartholomew Barclay, Quaker author, 1648; James Gibbs, architect, 1682; Frans van Mieris the Younger, painter, 1689; Johann Heinrich

Rolle, organist and composer, 1718; Sir Richard Arkwright, inventor of the spinning frame, 1732; Frederick Augustus I, King of Saxony, 1750; Sir Martin Archer-Shee, portrait painter, 1870; Alexander I, Tsar of Russia, 1877; Jean-François Champollion, Egyptologist and decipherer of the Rosetta Stone, 1790; Charles-Augustin Sainte-Beuve, writer and critic, 1804; Joseph Smith, founder of the Mormons (Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints), 1805; Karl Richard Lepsius, Egyptologist, 1810; Samuel Smiles, author, 1812; "Lord" George Sanger, circus proprietor, 1827; Edouard de Rodas (Mieczyslaw), bass singer, 1835; Arthur Read Ropes ("Adrian Ross"), typist, 1859; Sir Hugh Percy Allen,

organist, 1869; Joseph Arthur, First Baron Rank, miller and film magnate, 1888; Deshaies Henri I de de Lozanne, Third Duc de Guise, assassin, 1588; William Davidson, Scottish Secretary of State to Queen Elizabeth I, 1608; Michael Drayton, poet, 1631; John Cotton, puritan leader in America, 1632; Jan Dismas Zelenka, composer, 1745; Alastair Rudall Macdonnell, Jacobite spy "Fiddle", 1761; John Downman, portrait painter, 1824; Thomas Robert Malthus, economist, 1834; Dr James Cowles Fitchard, etymologist, 1848; Hugh Miller, geologist, 1856; Sir Charles Loch Eisele, painter, 1865; Jean-Victor Poncelet, mathematician and engineer, 1867; Abraham Cooper, painter, 1868; George

Callin, art and author, 1872; Lawrence Oliphant, journalist and traveller, 1888; Jean-Baptiste Edouard Detaille, painter, 1912; Thomas William Hodgson Crossland, journalist, 1924; Anthony Hadden Gerard Folker, aircraft designer, 1939; Charles Dana Gibson, artist and illustrator, 1944; Hildebrand Tojo, former Japanese prime minister, hanged, 1948; Eric Coates, composer, 1957; Edward Frederick Lindley Wood, First Earl of Halifax, Viceroy of India, 1959; Andrei Nikolaevich Tsiolkovsky, Soviet aircraft designer, 1972; Ernst Krenek, composer, 1901. On this day HMS *Bounty*, commanded by William Bligh, sailed from Spithead for the South Seas, 1787; the poem "Twas the Night Be-

fore Christmas" (true title: "A Visit from St Nicholas" by Clement Clarke Moore) was printed in the *Troy Sentinel*, New York, 1823; Asiatic cholera first appeared in Scotland, 1831; Joseph Hanson painted a type of ship, 1834; over 60 vessels were lost in the North Atlantic during heavy storms, 1890; Hamperkin's opera *Hansel and Gretel* was first produced, Weimar, 1893; the Aldwych Theatre, London, opened, 1905; Albert I ascended the throne of Belgium, 1909; Wolf-Ferrari's opera *The Jewels of the Madonna* was first produced, Berlin, 1911; a bomb was thrown at Lord Hardinge, Viceroy of India, as he entered the new capital at Delhi, 1912; the Federal Reserve Bank was founded in the USA, 1913;

In Germany, Maximilian von der Lubbe, a Dutchman, was found guilty of setting fire to the Reichstag and sentenced to death, 1933; British forces took Benghazi, 1941; in the USSR, Lavrenti Beria and six others were executed for treason, 1953; Rene-Jules Gustave Coey was elected president of France, 1953; 117 people died when the cruise liner *Lakonia* burned in the Atlantic, 919 people were saved, 1963; Managua, capital of Nicaragua, was destroyed by an earthquake, with a loss of 12,000 lives, 1972. Today is the Feast Day of St Dagobert II of Austria, St Fithnebert, St John of Kani, St Servulus, The Ten Martyrs of Crete, St Theodor and Saints Victoria and Anatolia.

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business & city

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BUSINESS & CITY EDITOR: JEREMY WARNER

New Northern bid deadline disputed

Chris Godsmark
Business Correspondent

BZW, the investment bank advising Northern Electric, is today expected to seek leave to appeal against a Takeover Panel ruling which extended the final deadline for a £782m hostile takeover bid for the company by US-controlled CE Electric from Friday until lunchtime tomorrow.

The unexpected extension came after details emerged of a £250,000 "performance" fee to be paid to BZW by Northern. The payment followed Wednesday's controversial purchase by BZW, Northern's brokers, of a 2.3 per cent stake.

Northern yesterday vehemently denied that the purchase of the stake and the perfor-

mance payment were in any way connected. However, the furious row over tactics which has engulfed the bid was threatening to seriously dent BZW's reputation and to cost Northern Electric its independence.

It also raises the possibility that the Securities and Futures Authority may mount an investigation into the affair.

The appeal promises to be one of the toughest and most controversial decisions the panel, which lays down the rules for takeover bids, has had to take.

Last night CalEnergy, the US power generator which controls CE Electric, was claiming victory over Northern, with 50.33 per cent of shares under its control. However, this included acceptances from share-

holders received after the original final deadline of 1pm on Friday, at which stage CalEnergy spoke for 49.77 per cent, just short of the 50 per cent and one share necessary to win.

Though the deadline has now been extended until 1pm on Christmas Eve, the panel has yet

to decide whether additional acceptances received after Friday will be taken into account.

The arguments first erupted last Wednesday when BZW disclosed to the Stock Exchange that it had bought 2.3 per cent of Northern shares at 645p a share for £15.2m. BZW pledged

to back the management, though the company maintained it had no prior knowledge of the purchase.

CalEnergy appealed to the Takeover Panel, accusing BZW of attempting to manipulate the bid outcome, but the panel upheld its original decision to

approve the share-buying on the grounds that "such purchases were conducted on an arm's length basis with no financial support, arrangement or understanding with Northern".

The panel also said BZW had made it clear it was being paid by Northern on a flat-fee basis

and would receive no special payments for buying the stakes.

If Northern defeats the CalEnergy bid at 650p a share, its share price would almost certainly fall substantially, effectively leaving loyal shareholders, including BZW, out of pocket.

Last Thursday, Northern was believed to have agreed to pay BZW a £250,000 "performance" fee, on top of a flat-rate sum for its work, believed to be about £1.5m. It was not until Friday that the BZW team, led by senior director Simon de Zoete, disclosed the performance payment to the panel.

Yesterday Northern claimed the fee related to a similar sum which had been left unpaid after work done by BZW during the defence of an earlier

hostile bid for the company by Trafalgar House, which lapsed in spring 1995.

BZW also said the performance fee, which had been agreed but had not yet been received, was not success-related. A spokesman said: "A very small element of our fee was payable at the discretion of the company if it considered we had carried out our broking advisory services well. Clearly that fee was in no way connected to the purchase of shares and we reached our decision to purchase the shares without consideration of that element of the fee. Our fee, including the discretionary element, did not alter as a result of our purchase of shares and remains the same irrespective of the outcome of the bid."

The countdown to chaos

Wednesday 18 December

• BZW and Schroders, Northern's advisers, buy 2.4 million Northern Electric shares, or 2.3 per cent of the company, with approval of the Takeover Panel.

• CE Electric's appeal to the panel is dismissed on grounds there was no breach of its code.

• The ruling says the stake was approved on the basis that the purchases were on

an "arm's length basis" with Northern.

the offer deadline to 1pm Christmas Eve.

Friday 20 December

• BZW tells the panel about the £250,000 "performance" fee.

• The panel asks CE Electric not to reveal the result of the bid, which closed at 1pm, until midnight. At this stage CE Electric held 49.77 per cent of Northern.

• A full panel hearing decides to extend

Saturday 21 December

• CE Electric says acceptances received after the 1pm deadline give it control of Northern, with a 50.33 per cent stake.

Sunday 22 December

• BZW and Northern considers appealing against the extension of the bid deadline.

Pension funds hit out at Greenbury code on top pay

Peter Rodgers
Financial Editor

Britain's big investors yesterday launched a surprise attack on the effectiveness of the Greenbury code of practice on executive pay.

The National Association of Pension Funds (NAPF), which represents some of the City's most influential institutional investors, said Greenbury had "not allayed concerns" among shareholders and required a number of improvements.

In evidence to the Hampel Committee on corporate governance, the NAPF criticised the way directors' performance targets were set and measured.

It also suggested that non-executive directors, who made up the remuneration committees that set boardroom pay, could benefit from specialist training to help them do the job better. And the NAPF toughened its support for a maximum rolling contract of one year for executive directors.

In a report that reflects widespread unease at the potential for abuse of the one long-term incentive plans recommended 18 months ago by the Greenbury report, the NAPF said the methods used to determine pay were often viewed with scepticism by shareholders, and confidence in board procedures needed to be bolstered.

The principles for setting performance targets for directors and the measurement of performance against these targets needed reinforcing, the NAPF told the Hampel Committee, which is the successor to the Cadbury Committee on corporate governance. The NAPF recommended "further elaboration" of the Greenbury code on top pay, to give guidance to remuneration committees.

The Hampel Committee, led by ICI chairman Sir Ronald Hampel, should consider giving guidance to remuneration committees on how to determine directors' pay packages and how to make their reports to shareholders, which the NAPF believed should be a single, self-contained report rather than scattered through notes to the accounts.

The pension funds also recommended that all directors should be required to retire by rotation, so poor performing members of the remuneration committee could be sanctioned.

The NAPF said: "Further guidance is needed in connection with the determination of performance targets, which must be challenging without being demotivating."

The evidence to the Hampel Committee said remuneration policy should be clearly and comprehensively stated, accompanied by tables, and any new bonus arrangements or long-term incentive plans "should be explained and the measurement targets justified prior to implementation".

However, the NAPF urged that the importance of directors'

remuneration issues should be kept in perspective, and any new guidelines adopted by the Hampel Committee should be flexible enough to meet the circumstances of individual companies. It also insisted that shareholder approval of individual directors' pay was impractical.

The NAPF said recent litigation had reinforced the need for rolling contracts in most cases to be for no longer than a year. Compensation has in the past been cut back in situations where directors are likely to find another job, but this "legal duty to mitigate" had been weakened by court decisions.

The NAPF also urged that company secretaries should, for the first time, be given the same security of tenure as auditors, so that only shareholders could dismiss them.

It said the Hampel Committee should resist the urge to toughen the Cadbury code with more prescriptive requirements for companies, and it should be pragmatic and flexible.

Among detailed improvements, boards should explain why any director over 70 who is up for re-election should be retained, and publish brief biographical details of all directors in the annual report.

The NAPF reaffirmed its objection to two-tier shareholdings that give one class of share fewer rights, defected the single board system against the controversial two-tier structure and said there should be a pragmatic approach to implementing the Cadbury code for small firms.

The NAPF opposed the appointment of executive directors to represent particular interests, though it said all directors must take into account the interests of "relevant stakeholders" as well as shareholders.

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Sir Ronald Hampel: He had 'not allayed concerns'



Rhodes around the City: Celebrity chef Gary Rhodes has teamed up with Gardner Merchant, Britain's largest catering company, to provide catering services for his new restaurant in the Square Mile.

The restaurant, called City Rhodes, is due to

open for lunch and early dinner on 14 January. Mr Rhodes, best known for his popular television series promoting the virtues of British cuisine, will become Gardner Merchant's executive chef and train more than 300 of its cooks each year at the restaurant.

He is pictured (left) discussing dishes to be served at the restaurant with Garry Hawkes, Gardner's chairman and chief executive. Gardner Merchant used to be part of the Forte group, but is now owned by Sodexo of France.

Pearson refuses to expand into football

Patrick Toohy

The main board of Pearson, the media and information conglomerate, has rejected an approach by Greg Dyke, who heads its television subsidiary, to consider taking a stake in the booming football sector by buying into a top club.

Pearson's refusal to expand its leisure interests by becoming involved in football is thought to be a last hurrah from the old guard of directors under Lord

Blakenham, who is standing down as chairman in the spring. It also comes as the future status of Pearson Television, which includes Thames TV and Grundy Worldwide, is being examined in a strategic review to coincide with the arrival of Marjorie Scardino as new chief executive of the parent company in a fortnight's time.

Mr Dyke, a keen football fan, believes top clubs, as holders of the rights to televised games, represent an outstanding in-

vestment opportunity. He recently spoke of the "untold riches" that awaited leading Premier League clubs Manchester United and Newcastle from the introduction of pay-per-view television next year.

Pearson is the latest media and leisure group to be linked with football, though Granada recently dismissed speculation that it might bid for Manchester United.

Meanwhile, it was confirmed yesterday that a consortium of

investors led by the broadcaster Sir David Frost planned to take a substantial minority stake in Southampton, the struggling Premier League side. The consortium has also pledged its support for the board of directors.

Mr Frost and Gavin Davies, chief economist at Goldman Sachs, the US investment bank, intend to pump several million pounds into the club. The planned investment is separate from a £10m reverse takeover agreed earlier this month by

Southampton's directors. Under the proposed deal, Southampton would reverse into Secure Retirement, a property development and healthcare company, and gain a stock market listing. It is yet to be approved by shareholders at an extraordinary general meeting.

Mr Davies, a Southampton season ticket holder for 35 years, insists the consortium's move is motivated by sound commercial reasons - and a love of the Saints.

Lilley urged to keep gas payment scheme

Chris Godsmark

The Gas Consumers Council and independent gas suppliers have appealed to the Government not to withdraw a long-running scheme which helps the poorest families on benefits pay their heating bills, claiming the move could seriously disrupt domestic competition.

Sue Slipman, director of the Gas Consumers Council (GCC), has written to Peter Lilley, Secretary of State for Social Security, urging him to clarify the future of the direct payments scheme and accusing him of

undermining the work of the Department of Trade and Industry, which has promoted competition for residential consumers.

Some 400,000 households are currently members of the scheme, which is offered to families on benefit at the discretion of the Department of Social Security. It aims to help them avoid getting into debt by setting aside income support money and using it to pay fuel or water bills directly to the utility companies concerned. Of these around 185,000 customers use the scheme to pay gas bills. However, a document leaked

last week to *The Independent* suggested Mr Lilley had agreed to abolish the scheme. It said the Government should "not be in the business of social banking, debt management and should seek to develop a disengagement strategy, leading ultimately to the withdrawal of the direct payments scheme".

According to the GCC this could encourage some British Gas rivals to try to "cherry-pick" more affluent customers in breach of licence conditions laid down by the industry watchdog, Ofgas. These stipulate that all suppliers must agree to pro-

vide gas to any potential customer, regardless of income or other circumstances.

The GCC has already rebuked one firm, Eastern Gas, for its marketing tactics and is closely scrutinising others.

Ms Slipman said some suppliers would be even more likely to adopt questionable tactics to get round the rules. One problem is the difficulty of proving that companies are deliberately seeking to discriminate against poorer households.

She said: "The only way we are going to solve this is to make poorer customers more attrac-

tive. Otherwise we are going to get companies refusing to supply gas or using selective marketing to avoid taking on these customers. If they do that we'll be down on them like a ton of bricks."

In addition, many families were more likely to fall into debt with their gas supplier and would almost certainly be forced to install pre-payment meters, increasing their bills by some 25 per cent. Ofgas allows suppliers to pass on the extra cost of administering pre-payment tariffs.

Pre-payment meter customers temporarily disconnect them-

selves when they can no longer afford to pay their bills, but do not appear on the official lists of permanent disconnections. Gas suppliers also like the direct payment scheme because they are guaranteed to receive payment for bills, so encouraging them not to install pre-payment meters.

Neil Lambert, joint general manager of Calorix, an independent domestic gas company, explained: "One problem is that the Government hasn't really come up with a proper alternative scheme. But if people were forced on to pre-payment meters the costs would go up."

IN BRIEF

• Granada has sold the exclusive Sandy Lane hotel in Barbados for £38m to a consortium of Irish investors led by Dermot Desmond and JP McMahon. Mr Desmond owns London City airport while Mr McMahon, a former bookmaker, is now a currency and commodities trader. The consortium will upgrade Sandy Lane, which was acquired by Granada when it bought Forte earlier this year. Last month Granada sold another of its Forte trophy hotels, the Hyde Park in London, for £86m. Granada is still looking for a buyer for its Welcome Break service chain, for which Michael Guthrie, a former head of Mecca Leisure, has emerged as bidder.

• German carmaker BMW denied a report that its Rover unit was in talks with Chrysler of the US to develop and produce a joint model. "There are no talks," a spokesman said, describing the report as a misunderstanding of a joint car-engine plant that BMW and Chrysler said then they would spend \$400m in a joint venture to build engines in Latin America for Rover's Mini model. Rover also denied that talks for a joint car model were taking place. The reports said Rover and Chrysler would develop a new model in "the upper-medium range" to replace the Rover 400, the company's best-selling car.

• Stet, the Italian telecom holding company, completed its long-awaited co-operation deal with IBM, the US computer giant, 16 months after proposals were announced. The companies intend to market each others' products but the accord falls short of the wide-ranging relationship many in the market had hoped for. The joint marketing deal includes promotion of computing, networking, information technology, Internet and voice and data services.

• The sale of Creditanstalt, Austria's second-biggest bank, could be delayed again, finance minister Viktor Klima warned. Creditanstalt is Europe's longest-running privatisation saga and Mr Klima is the third finance minister to attempt the sale in the past six years. A number of bids have been received but an offer by Bank Austria caused political controversy and split the ruling coalition of Social Democrats and the rightist People's Party.

• William Cook, the steel castings group, yesterday urged Triplex Lloyd to withdraw its "ludicrous" £58m bid. Cook claimed the Birmingham-based engineer was becoming "increasingly desperate to divert attention away" from its true level of profitability. Cook is forecasting a big increase in profits in the second half due to lower refurbishment costs.

STOCK MARKETS									
FTSE 100									
	Index	Close	Week's Chg	Change (%)	1996 High	1996 Low	Vol (m)	Open	Close
FTSE 100	4077.60	+105.2	+2.6	4077.60	3632.30	3.91			
FTSE 250	4448.40	+90.1	+2.1	4448.40	4015.30	3.56			
FTSE 350	2033.70	+49.8	+2.5	2033.70	1816.60	3.83			
FTSE SmallCap	2158.60	+30.2	+1.4	2244.38	1954.08	3.19			
FTSE All-Share	1993.71	+47.5	+2.4	1994.54	1791.95	3.79			
New York	6484.40	+179.5	+2.8	6547.79	5932.94	2.09			
Tokyo	19690.46	-680.9	-3.2	22666.80	19570.67	0.81			
Hong Kong	13131.41	+347.3	+2.7	13630.95	10204.87	3.22			
Frankfurt	2854.45	+54.7	+2.0	2909.91	2253.38	1.63			

Source: FT Information

INTEREST RATES									
UK interest rates									
	1 Month	3 Month	6 Month	1 Year	2 Year	3 Year	5 Year	10 Year	30 Year
UK	6.06	6.94	7.59	7.53	7.87	7.68			
US	5.84	5.76	6.34	5.73	6.59	8.08			
Japan	0.19	0.43	2.36	1.52					
Germany	3.25	3.18	5.83	6.10	6.73	6.87			
Bond Yields %									
	1 Month	3 Month	6 Month	1 Year	2 Year	3 Year	5 Year	10 Year	30 Year
UK	6.06	6.94	7.59	7.53	7.87	7.68			
US	5.84	5.76	6.34	5.73	6.59	8.08			
Japan	0.19	0.43	2.36	1.52					
Germany	3.25	3.18	5.83	6.10	6.73	6.87			
MAIN PRICE CHANGES									
	1 Month	3 Month	6 Month	1 Year	2 Year	3 Year	5 Year	10 Year	30 Year
Brent Crude Oil	742.5	87	13.3	217.5	17.5	7.4			
Enterprise Oil	636.5	65	11.4	105	5.5	5.0			
Gen Accident	790	72	10.5	992.5	48	4.7			

CURRENCIES									
\$/£									
	Close	Week's Chg	1 Year	3 Year	5 Year	10 Year	30 Year		
\$ (London)	1.8887	+0.0006	1.5415						
\$ (New York)	1.8720	+0.0006	1.5430						
DM (London)	2.5689	+0.0006	2.2200						
¥ (London)	190.287	+11.545	198.004						
£ Index	94.1	+0.9	83.0						
\$/DM									
	Close	Week's Chg	1 Year	3 Year	5 Year	10 Year	30 Year		
\$ (London)	0.8000	-0.01	0.6487						
\$ (New York)	0.8001	-0.01	0.6481						
DM (London)	1.5539	+0.0006	1.4402						
¥ (London)	114.170	+10.340	102.500						
£ Index	98.4	+0.3	94.1						
OTHER INDICATORS									
	Close	Week's Chg	1 Year	3 Year	5 Year	10 Year	30 Year		
Oil Brent	23.84	+0.15	17.82						
Gold	389.15	-0.05	387.40						
Gold £	221.49	-0.58	251.64						
Base Rates	6.00%	6.75							

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science

The year of living uncertainly

Charles Arthur reviews what scientists nailed down this year – and what eluded them

Life and death, doom and destruction – not the plot of a Hollywood thriller, but the main themes of the past year in science, and all with a single strand running through them: uncertainty.

However, the team funded by the US space agency Nasa speaking in August didn't sound that uncertain. Life on Mars? They were confident that there once was – based on an astonishingly detailed examination of a Martian meteorite, known as ALH 84001, discovered in Antarctica.

Unlike the cartoon image of a white-coated scientist squinting down a microscope and yelling, "Hey, come and look at these!", the Nasa work was the result of complex interdisciplinary research. True, it did involve a certain amount of squinting down (electron) microscopes, but there was also input from geologists, mineralogists, experts in the chemistry of meteorites, and biologists.

David McKay, who led the team based at Johnson Space Center, said: "There is not any one finding that leads us to believe that this is evidence of past life on Mars. Rather, it is a combination of many things that we have found." Those included the detection by a team at Stanford University of an apparently unique pattern of organic molecules (known as polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons, or PAHs) and several unusual mineral phases that are known products of primitive microscopic organisms on Earth. "The relationship of all of these things in terms of location – within a few hundred thousandths of an inch of one another – is the most compelling evidence," he said.

But he was careful to round off his comments by saying, "What we have found to be the most reasonable interpretation is not so radical a nature that it will only be accepted or rejected after other groups either confirm our findings or overturn them."

They've certainly been trying to do the latter. Since August, three papers in the journal which is the touchstone for meteorite scientists – *Geochimica et Cosmochimica Acta* – have offered inorganic explanations for the observations in ALH 84001. One paper suggests that the PAHs found in the meteorite in fact came from the surroundings, another that the microstructures in the meteorite could not have been made by organic action.

But as Ian Wright of the Open University said last week, as the latest doubts were raised, "My position on this swings from one day to the next. Some people are going to make it their life's work to prove or disprove this.



False dawns: all we know for certain about the link between BSE and CJD is what we still don't know

The fact is, this is an incredibly complicated piece of rock. It confounds all of us because we can't tell a coherent story about it. Life on Mars? Don't be too sure.

However, in the case of mad cow disease, or BSE, and the fatal human illness Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease (CJD), there is a coherent story. In March, the secretary of state for health, Stephen Dorrell, announced that the most likely cause of a new form of CJD, affecting people far younger than the usual disease, was exposure to BSE. So far, the toll is 13 dead from the "new variant" CJD, and two more confirmed cases still alive.

While it is worth noticing that this toll is lower than from the recent outbreak of *E. coli* 157 in Lancashire, the key difference is that we know plenty about *E. coli* 157, whereas by comparison we know hardly anything about a BSE-CJD link. We can prevent *E. coli* infection by taking standard hygiene precautions with food preparation. But what should we avoid if we think that eating BSE-infected food leads to

CJD? How dangerous is BSE-infected food? What constitutes a fatal dose – one bite, one burger, one meal? Indeed, which are the foods that put us at risk? The fact that CJD is irreversible and fatal makes us all the more keen to know those answers. The trouble is, nobody honestly knows.

The evidence for a link remains circumstantial rather than forensic; but some members of Seac, the government's advisory committee on BSE and CJD, are sure of it. The next problem is to forecast the epidemic, since thousands of infected cows were eaten by humans. The latest estimates, in a paper submitted to the medical journal *The Lancet* (but not yet published), suggests a peak in about seven years' time, affecting hundreds of people. Certainly! The only things we're certain of here is what we don't know.

As for doom, dinosaur-style, the portents looked as bad as at any time since the day 65 million years ago when a huge interplanetary rock crashed into the Yucatan peninsula. The evidence has been growing that

there are huge pieces of rock floating about which could devastate the Earth; but, basically, we've got better at noticing them. The latest estimate is that there are more than 100,000 asteroids bigger than a football stadium floating "near" (within millions of miles) of us. There were two "near-misses" in 1996 (both passing a few million miles away, which in celestial terms is no distance at all), and one notable impact, when in November a meteorite travelling at about eight miles per second – a modest 28,800 mph – crashed into a remote area of Honduras, leaving a 165ft crater and starting a fire which consumed several acres of a coffee plantation. Happily, nobody was hurt. But there was no warning; governments have been lukewarm about funding for "space radar" to detect threatening meteorites. And there's then the question of what you would do to deflect one. Again, there are multiple layers of uncertainty which science can do only a little to peel away.

Of course, the risk from meteorites

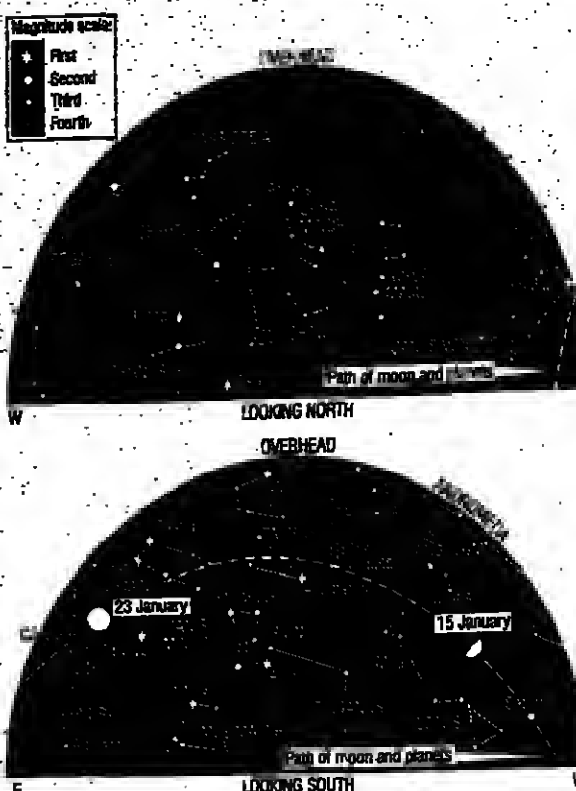
pales a little compared to the damage we're able to wreak with our own ground-launched rockets, notably those which go wrong. In March, a one-ton oak-paneled (honestly) Chinese spy satellite veered out of orbit and splashed into the sea, though not before whistling over most countries in the world. And in November, the six-ton Mars 96 rocket, launched by Russia, also fell into the sea a day after taking off on a Mars mission.

Not that we can feel proud. The European Space Agency's Ariane 5 rocket blew up less than a minute after take-off, destroying the life work of some scientists whose experiments (to measure solar activity) were on board. The cause of the failure? A tiny software error in one of the engine controls.

So, it has been a year which has provided plenty of scientific advance – and yet reminded us each time that the corollary of science is uncertainty. As a certain TV programme's slogan notes, the truth is out there. Sometimes, though, it's damned elusive.

The stars at night

The sky as it will appear in mid-January at 10pm



January sees the stars putting on their finest display of the year. The really brilliant constellations of Orion, Gemini and Taurus will be riding high in the south. You'll also spot Sirius, the brightest star in the sky, appearing to flash all the colours of the rainbow. This is nothing to do with the star itself, but an effect caused by seeing it low in the sky through countless layers of our churning atmosphere.

On the night of 3-4 January, look out for enhanced shooting star activity – possibly as many as one a minute – from the Quadrantids meteor shower. Perspective makes the meteors appear to come from a spot in the sky beyond the end of the Great Bear's "tail" (marked on the chart as Ursa Major). This is the site of an old constellation called Quadrans (the quadrant) which no longer appears on modern maps.

This doesn't mean that the meteors have travelled from that constellation. It's simply the Earth's orbit taking it through the remnants of an asteroid which broke up at a particular spot in space. The annual variations in meteor intensity are caused by the fact that space is awfully big – and every time the Earth passes by, its gravity swirls those remnants around a little more.

Despite those displays, only two planets are on show. The ringed world of Saturn is on duty during the early evening, setting in the west at 10pm. The red planet, Mars, then rises in the east and shines through the rest of the night. Because Saturn and Mars are close enough (celestial speaking) to show in the sky as faint discs, they are not blurred by air-currents, so, like all planets, they don't twinkle.

January diary
2 Moon at last quarter 1.40pm
3-4 Maximum of Quadrantids meteor shower
9 New moon 4.26am
15 Moon at first quarter 8.02pm
23 Full moon 3.11pm
24 Mercury at greatest western elongation
31 Moon at last quarter 7.41pm

Heather Couper and Nigel Henbest

theoretically ...

New therapies for HIV and Aids, such as protease inhibitors and the basic discovery that some natural molecules can suppress HIV, constitute the "Breakthrough of the Year", according to *Science* magazine. It said that the new work (which includes the discovery that some people are naturally highly resistant to HIV) "raises the possibility that HIV infection may one day become a chronic rather than fatal disease".

The Museum of Improbable Research is now open if you're dropping by Harvard University. It's devoted to collecting "irrelevant objects" from research efforts that are "unlikely to receive funding through normal channels", says curator Marc Abrahams, who is also editor of the *Annals of Improbable Research* – devoted to research which "could not, or should not, be repeated". Among exhibits is an undated 1996 Ig-Nobel prize, a decapitated Barbie and a

"Stuffeduffs of Science" calendar – as featured on this page a year ago.

Could some breast cancer be caused by underlying genetic abnormalities in apparently normal tissue? That's the suggestion of a team from California Pacific Medical Center in San Francisco who analysed breast tissue from a small number of patients after mastectomies. Some patients showed genetic changes in otherwise normal tissue next to the cancer. The conclusion: some breast cancers may arise because the normal tissue near the tumour acts as localised, predisposed regions. They say, however, that larger studies are needed to confirm the work.

Hi-tech industry in the UK has a bright future, thanks to the quality of research being done in universities, said a survey published last week. As part of a rating exercise of every university department in the country, by the Higher Education Funding Council for England, computer science was found to be health-

ier than ever. Relative newcomers to the top table included Bath, Bristol, Lancaster and Southampton universities. Top scorers were Cambridge, Oxford, Imperial College, Warwick, York and Glasgow universities.

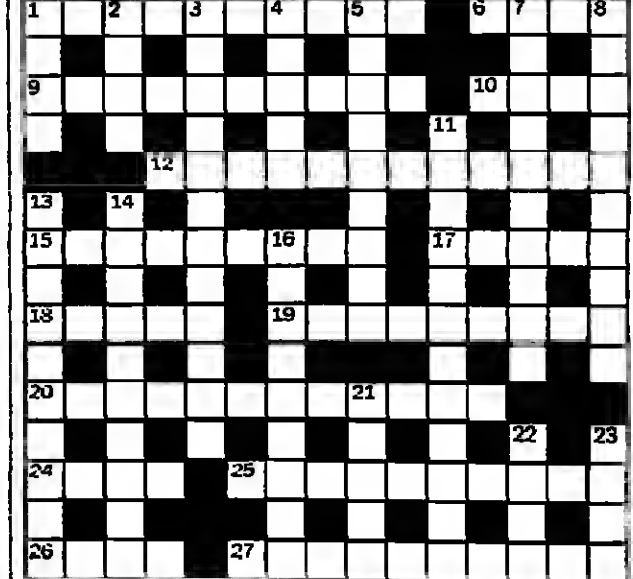
Radiation doses received by people living near Greenham Common and Newbury, where a US airbase stored nuclear weapons, are no different from those received elsewhere in the country, according to the National Radiological Protection Board. It studied 29 locations outside the base and 18 inside it. None of the measurements was higher than would be expected for natural radiation in the area, it says in a report published last week.

Not a breakthrough, but a break: the Science page is taking a seasonal week's break, and will be back in the New Year. We hope readers experience a happy Christmas – within experimental limits, of course.

Charles Arthur

THE INDEPENDENT CROSSWORD

No. 3177, Monday 23 December By Aled

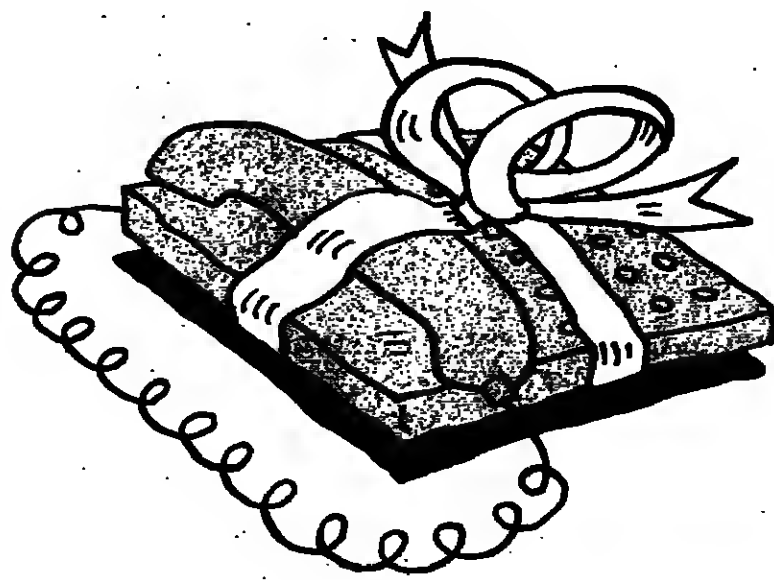


ACROSS
1 In no way a round of toast (6,4)
6 Men in a boat, say, will need time to get to port (4)
9 Friend holds essential data to get artist justice (10)
10 Semi-learned boss (4)
12 Obese women in L.A. women who, if married, would have these (7,2,3)
15 Making Hal cry badly in Paris could be so described (9)

17 Perform funeral rites in mountain territory (5)
18 Is first-rate New Testament character like Paul? (5)
19 Latest type of retail outlet? (4,5)
20 Give weapons to our scared forces which will protect them (8,4)
24 Talk inconsequentially, powerless to make an assessment (4)
25 Puh gets praise for breaking new ground (10)

26 Possible catch on Day 1? (4)
27 There's no case for Parliament to enact this (7,3)
DOWN
1 In industries America is not different (4)
2 Strongly suggest sudden rise must be nipped in the bud (4)
3 Don't use French writer to engage artist as host to diners? (12)
4 Perfume said in Liverpool to indicate civic dignity? (5)
5 Great wolf could be feature of sky following sunset (9)
7 How to get part for old car? (10)
8 Cry of approval about Lord wed unusually in ancient style (4,6)
11 One in ministry is polite to acolyte? (5,7)
13 One pair of lines asterisked and doomed (3,7)
14 Church is to become tangled splitting thus? (10)
16 £500 given to teachers secures source of protein (6,3)
21 Small volume issued has influence (5)
22 British trouble requiring legislation (4)
23 Maybe a singular piece of information for the second time? (4)

AND REMEMBER
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FOR CHRISTMAS.



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